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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

SPAIN...Ajax celebrate knocking holders Real Madrid out of the Champions League

URUGUAY...Juan Cazares of Brazil's Atletico Mineiro is mobbed after scoring against Defensor Sporting

PORTUGAL...Sweden's Caroline Seger (left) and Vanessa Marques of Portugal compete during the Algarve Cup

JAPAN...fans of Malaysian club Johor Darul Ta'zim cheer on their team against Kashima Antlers

CHILE...Patrick of Brazil's Internacional battles two Palestino players

GERMANY...Anthony Modeste of Cologne after scoring against Sandhausen

FRANCE...Monaco's Radamel Falcao high fives the mascots as he walks onto the pitch

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FROM THE EDITOR

After the Champions League round-of-16 games produced four English quarter-finalists, there was plenty of excitable talk of a new era of English dominance of the European club game. The quarter-final draw has opened up the possibility of an all-English Final for the first time since Manchester United played Chelsea in Moscow in 2008.

In the last 20 years we have had an all Italian Final (Milan-Juventus, 2003), one all-English (United-Chelsea, 2008), one all-German (Bayern-Dortmund, 2013) and three all-Spanish (Real Madrid-Valencia, 2000, Real-Atletico, 2014 and 2016).

Perhaps the real question we should be asking is why, given their superior finances, have English clubs not reached the latter stages more often.

> Given their superior finances, why have English clubs not reached the latter stages more often?

The real achievement this season has been the likes of Ajax and Porto making the quarter-finals at the expense of richer teams from wealthier leagues. Scouting and signing the best young players is no longer enough. Key to success for the likes of Ajax is knowing when to cash-in on those players and re-invest in new signings.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

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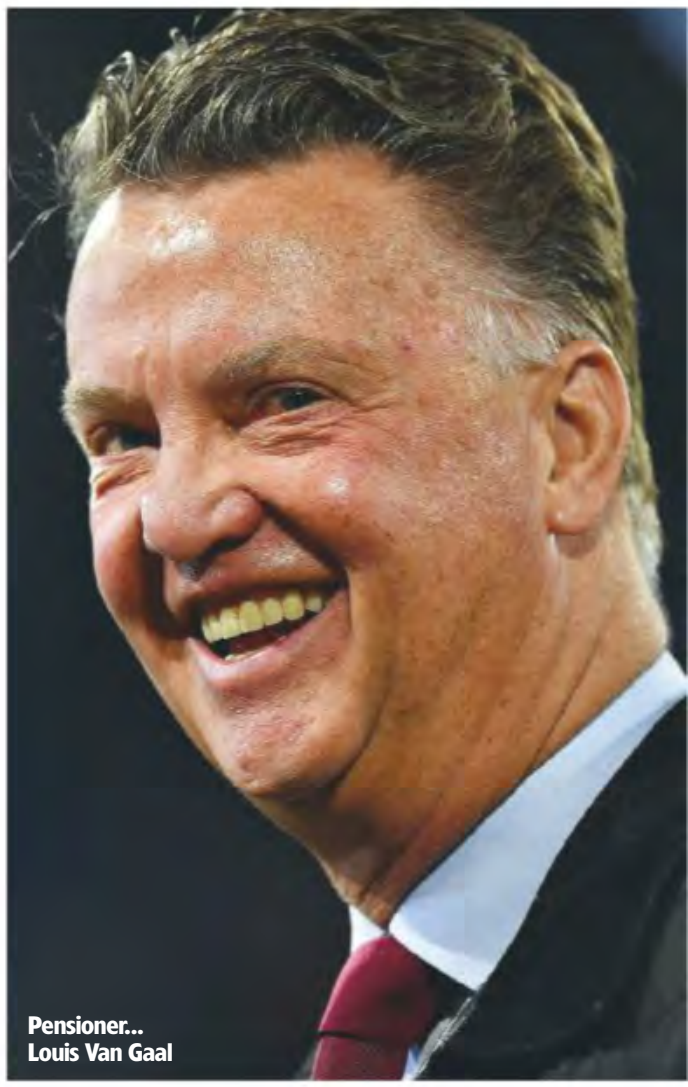

Pensioner... Louis Van Gaal

HOLLAND

Van Gaal confirms his retirement

Former Ajax, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Manchester United and Holland coach Louis Van Gaal has confirmed his retirement as a coach.

"I am a pensioner now," he said on Dutch television. "I have no ambition to be a technical director or a TV pundit.

"My wife Truus gave up her job for me 22 years ago and followed me when I went abroad. I told her I would quit as a coach when I turned 55, but instead kept going until I was 65.

"She is entitled to have a life with me outside of football. I can say she is very happy."

Van Gaal won the 1995 Champions League with Ajax as well as three Eredivisie titles, the UEFA Cup, UEFA Super Cup and World Club Cup. He also won two Liga titles and the Spanish Cup with Barcelona, before returning to Holland to collect another league title with AZ.

He won the German league-and-cup double with Bayern Munich and the FA Cup with Manchester United.

Van Gaal had two spells as coach of Holland, guiding them to third place at the 2014 World Cup, and recently turned down an approach to take charge of Feyenoord.

"I would have preferred a different farewell for us"

Germany's Jerome Boateng on the end of the international road for himself, Mats Hummels and Thomas Muller

SWITZERLAND

Manchester clubs kept apart in UEFA draw

The two Manchester clubs, City and United, could meet in the 2019 Champions League Final in Madrid after they were kept apart in the quarter and semi-finals draw.

The Final is at Madrid's Metropolitano stadium on June 1.

QUARTER-FINALS, FIRST LEG
April 9
Liverpool v Porto
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester City

April 10
Ajax v Juventus
Manchester United v Barcelona

QUARTER-FINALS, SECOND LEG
April 16
Juventus v Ajax
Barcelona v Manchester United

April 17
Porto v Liverpool
Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur

SEMI-FINALS, FIRST LEG
Tottenham/Manchester City v Ajax/Juventus
Manchester Utd/Barcelona v Liverpool/Porto

SEMI-FINALS, SECOND LEG
Ajax/Juventus v Tottenham/Manchester City
Liverpool/Porto v Manchester Utd/Barcelona

Premier clash...Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City

HEROES & VILLAINS

Honest...Clement Grenier admitted he wasn't fouled

CLEMENT GRENIER

The Rennes midfielder fell in the penalty area under a challenge in a French Cup match against Orleans. The referee awarded a spot-kick but he told the official he had not been fouled and the decision was overturned.

PATRICIO RUBIO

Became the first Chile-born player to score four goals in a Libertadores Cup match since Chileans began playing in the tournament 59 years ago. He scored the goals for Universidad de Concepcion in their 5-4 win against Sporting Cristal, netting the winner in the third minute of added time.

JACK GREALISH

After being attacked on the pitch by a Birmingham City fan, the Aston Villa captain scored the only goal in his team's 1-0 Championship win at St Andrews.

Six-shooter... Moussa Marega

MOUSSA MAREGA

The Porto striker scored in his sixth successive Champions League match when he was on the scoresheet against Roma in the round of 16 second leg tie.

Two-match ban...Sergio Ramos (in black)

SERGIO RAMOS

The Real Madrid defender was given a two-match ban in the Champions League after UEFA ruled that he got himself a yellow card "on purpose" near the end of Madrid's Round of 16, first leg tie away to Ajax.

With the holders 2-1 up after the away leg, Ramos' intention was to miss a game and make sure he was available for both legs of the quarter-final. Ajax, however, had other ideas, and won 4-1 in the Bernabeu for a 5-3 aggregate.

TOMAS REPKA

The 45-year-old former West Ham United and Czech Republic defender was handed two jail terms, amounting to two years in prison, for drink driving and fraud. Last year he did community service after being found guilty of offering sexual services in the name of his ex-wife online without her knowledge.

SANFRECCE HIROSHIMA

The J.League club sent a reserve team, including three teenagers and with no first XI players, to China to play Guangzhou Evergrande in the Asian Champions League. They lost 2-0.

Reserve...Sanfreece Hiroshima's Kohei Shimizu (left)

"Kroos is now a diesel tractor. He's a shadow of what he was"

Former Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster on Toni Kroos (left)

Krzysztof PIATEK (Milan)

The €35million that Milan paid Genoa in the January transfer window for the Polish striker is already looking like money well spent.

The 23-year-old has carried on at his new club where he left off with his old one, grabbing spectacular goals and leading the scoring charts for both.

His goal against Chievo in March secured Milan's fifth successive Serie A victory and consolidated their challenge for a return to the Champions League. A potential third place behind Juventus and Napoli would be their highest finish for six seasons.

Piatek – pronounced "Piontek" – has also weighed in with eight goals in four Italian Cup matches, helping Milan to reach the semi-finals.

Looking for his first silverware as a coach, Milan's Gennaro Gattuso says of his new signing: "Piatek's a guy of few words. He's a bit like Robocop. All he says is "I want to score, I want to score." WS

Efrain ALVAREZ
(LA Galaxy)
The 16-year-old academy product engineered a comeback win over Chicago Fire in his first MLS game.

Mario BALOTELLI
(Marseille)
The Italian striker switched clubs in the south of France, moving from Nice to Marseille in the January window, and immediately began scoring goals again.

Moise KEAN
(Juventus)
The teenage forward, who was tipped to be sent out on loan by Juve in January, answered his critics with two goals in a 4-1 victory over Udinese.

Jaime MATA
(Getafe)
The 30-year-old striker is thriving in his first season in La Liga, helping Getafe to fourth place in the table.

Gelson MARTINS
(Monaco)
The Portuguese winger has been one of the main beneficiaries of Monaco's revival under Leonardo Jardim following the sacking of Thierry Henry.

Willi ORBAN
(RB Leipzig)
The Hungarian defender and RB Leipzig captain weighed in with some crucial goals as his side moved into third place in the Bundesliga.

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Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Time for IFAB to take a break

Tough...the referee's job is far from easy

Pity the poor referee. No wonder local associations all around the world are finding it evermore difficult to persuade people to take up the noble art of the whistle.

It's not enough that elite players set an example of petulance and deception, not enough that one-eyed parents and fans scream abuse from the touchline and threaten physical violence; referees also have to cope with the meddling of an organisation that is supposed to provide them with a level playing field: the International Football Association Board (IFAB).

Once upon a time one of the greatest strengths of association football was the conservatism of its lawmakers. Not for them a panic every year to change the scoring system or the time of play – the illustrations of insecurity evident in so many sports as they chase a TV contract or try to squeeze into the Olympic programme every four years.

But that has changed. Remember the definition of a camel? A horse designed by a committee. That is the road down which football has been galloping ever since IFAB was swallowed up in FIFA's reforms.

As an illustration, on March 5, three days after the latest annual meeting, IFAB had to publish this clarification: "Contrary to some incorrect reports in the media related to the penalty kick procedure (Law 14), the ball will remain in play in the event of a penalty kick rebounding from the goalkeeper, crossbar or goalposts. The only change to Law 14 discussed and agreed at the 133rd IFAB Annual General Meeting last Saturday is that the goalkeeper is now required to have only one foot on, or in line with, the goal line when a penalty kick is taken."

The fact that IFAB had to deny a piece of nonsense thrown around last year in its advisory committees was a demonstration of the danger to the game now lurking in the lawmakers' corridors of power.

It's going too far to suggest that IFAB itself has become a danger to the game, but it provides little fiddles and fuddles which undermine the understanding of the game among not only the fans but also the players.

Back in the 1860s the core tenets of association football were set out by John Charles Thring, a master at Uppingham School in the East Midlands, as *The Simplest Game*. His 10 footballing commandments on one sheet of paper were proposed as "an antidote to the Rugby game which has unhappily been lately adopted by many clubs".

Now the Laws of the Game – with introduction, interpretations, glossary and guidelines – run to 211 pages.

Of course, the game's evolution, incredible success, stunning worldwide popularity and the rapidly changing demands of a lifestyle and technology demand that football move with the times. But there is a difference between moving with the times and moving for the sake of the times.

Change...keepers will now need only one foot on the goalline when a penalty is taken

A need to standardise the laws of the game and their application led the four British home associations – England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales – to create IFAB for precisely this purpose on June 2, 1886.

In 1913, FIFA – then only nine years old – was awarded a vote and its influence on behalf of the rest of the world expanded steadily until 1958 brought the current set-up, with FIFA awarded four votes to balance the four British votes. Any decision to change the laws would demand at least six votes and that is how it has remained.

Plenty of federations and their leaders groused at the anachronistic presence and influence of the four home nations. But while the real political power within the game resided with FIFA's system of one-FA-one-vote, no serious objection was ever raised. IFAB had no role in sharing out the money and was thus allowed to exist in comparative peace.

It wasn't until December 2010 that IFAB ran into trouble in the fallout

from the scandal-scarred host votes for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Up until then this was how it all worked...

Four weeks before the annual meeting in February or March, the world's associations could submit proposals for change. These were then circulated worldwide to canvas opinion ahead of a vote in the AGM. Any change in the laws demanded – and still demands – six votes, so neither FIFA nor the Brits could force through their own pet project.

But the Brits and influential powers within FIFA fell out badly after the World Cup awards to Russia and Qatar, with England humiliated in the 2018 ballot by the FIFA ExCo with only two votes, despite a high-profile final presentation featuring Prince William and prime minister David Cameron.

That exacerbated the fury of the English-language media which had already been digging deeply into FIFA corruption. The sum total prompted retaliatory accusations of arrogance and colonialism, and the two vulnerable targets were the British vice-presidency of FIFA – negotiated on the home nations' return to membership in 1946 – and the half-control of IFAB.

In March 2012, FIFA president Sepp Blatter chaired a meeting of his new strategic committee at which composition of IFAB was a priority agenda item. IFAB was duly "invited" by the new FIFA reform taskforce to consider whether it believed itself in need of reform.

Bartering continued for almost two years before Britain conceded the loss of its FIFA vice-presidency. However, UEFA agreed that one of its FIFA vice-presidents should come from the home nations, so the UK retained its four places on IFAB, with FIFA taking backroom command with two new supporting committees: a football advisory panel and a technical advisory panel.

Any committee is the same in any sphere: its members need to justify their presence at the table. The floodgates were open – for the good, the bad and the nonsensical.

So here's an idea: why not run to the next World Cup without any change, without any interference or any so-called "sensible improvement", without any meddling for its own sake? Just wheel out IFAB every four years to keep the core of the game relevant.

Stability might not only keep referees in the game, it might attract more to come on board, while maintaining the essence of simplicity – which is football's greatest attribute. WS

IFAB DECISIONS

● 2016: approved live experimentation with VAR, the pass back at kick-off, medical assessment on the pitch for injured players, a trial variation on the "triple punishment" and experimenting with allowing a fourth substitute in extra time.

● 2017: approved a "strategy" for "fairness and integrity", allowing regional competitive modifications at grassroots (sin bins, returning subs, etc), and another variation on punishments for goal-zone fouls.

● 2018: approved the introduction of VAR, an extra substitute in extra time, the use of communication equipment in the technical area and yet another variation on the denial of a goal-scoring opportunity.

Decision... using VAR

● 2019: approved a differential between accidental handball in normal play compared with in goalscoring situations, ordering substituted players to leave the pitch during play at the nearest point, yellow and red cards for misconduct by team officials, the ball not having to leave the penalty area at goal kicks and defending team free-kicks in the penalty area, a one-metre no-go zone round the wall for attacking players, and the need for a goalkeeper to have only one foot on the line at a penalty kick.

WINNERS

GIANLUIGI BUFFON

When Paris Saint-Germain beat Dijon 3-0 in the quarter-finals of the French Cup it was the 600th victory of the 41-year-old Italian goalkeeper's career.

ENGLAND WOMEN

Beat Japan in the Final of the SheBelieves Cup to give Phil Neville's team their first piece of silverware.

MANCHESTER UNITED

Became the first team in Champions League history to overturn a 2-0 first-leg defeat at home by winning away to go through to the next round.

PRO PIACENZA

The Italian third-tier side were expelled after fielding just seven players in a 20-0 defeat against Cuneo.

REAL MADRID

In seven days they lost twice at home to Barcelona and were knocked out of the Champions League by Ajax.

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

Eleven months after losing 8-2 to Newcastle Jets, the A-League side lost to Wellington Phoenix by the same score.

LOSERS

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

New handball ruling will be football's fandango

Why is it that so many of the pundits who agree with VAR being introduced to bring fairness to the game are the same people who applaud cynical fouls and claim that a player shown a yellow card had "to take one for the team"?

The deliberate trip, shirt pull or violent lunge that prevents a breakaway by the opposition is one of the most destructive elements of unfair play in football.

Yet, instead of contempt all round, there is approving tolerance.

Coaches and managers will tell you that in the modern game a significant number of goals are scored directly from moments of transition – when one side loses the ball to the other – which is why they work so hard on this aspect in training and why players are demanded to "take one for the team".

But as football changes, so must the laws and its language.

Movement on this particular form of cheating is likely to be slow, and it was nowhere to be seen on the agenda of a recent meeting of the International Football Association Board.

Instead, IFAB focused on the vexed issue of handball, along with trivialities such as where a player being substituted leaves the field and the introduction of yellow and red cards for errant managers on the touchline.

Handball was worth looking at, of course. Another curse of the modern game is the cry from players and spectators alike for "handball" every time a cross is made into the penalty area and it strikes a defender.

It has become a blight to see so many defenders playing with their arms unnaturally hidden behind their backs to prevent a handball decision. IFAB seems to agree and has given us a new phrase that will be on everybody's lips from next season when the new regulations are introduced. It is the "natural silhouette".

Explanation comes from former FIFA referee David Elleray, now IFAB's technical director, who says the lawmakers wanted to put an end to defenders placing their arms behind their backs in fear of conceding a free-kick or penalty.

According to Elleray: "We've changed to say the body has a certain silhouette. Players should be allowed to have their arms by their side because it's their natural silhouette. If the arms are extended beyond that silhouette then the body is being made unnaturally bigger, with the purpose of it being a bigger barrier to the opponent or the ball."

> "Players should be allowed to have their arms by their side because it's their natural silhouette"
>
> Former FIFA referee David Elleray

Even if the contact is accidental beyond the "natural silhouette" it is likely to be a free-kick. But what is the "natural silhouette" of a footballer when in the heat of frantic action? Maybe they will introduce a special graphic for use on the VAR screen like the straight line across the pitch for offside. Fifteen degrees angle away from the body – good? Twenty degrees – bad?

In a Champions League second-round tie between Schalke and Manchester City there was an incident where a long-range shot struck City's Nicolas Otamendi on the arm and flew away from goal. The referee signalled a corner but with the assistance of VAR it was changed to a penalty.

Otamendi's arm was by his side, naturally so in my view, and there was no deliberate movement to stop a ball travelling at speed. If the new regulations stop that being a penalty, it will be progress. But I cannot see handball remaining anything other than a contentious minefield.

Football's newest phrase brings to mind the lyrics of the Queen song *Bohemian Rhapsody*: "I see a little silhouette of a man, Scaramouch, Scaramouch will you do the fandango? Thunderbolt and lightning, very, very frightening..."

The football fandango is about to begin. WS

Unnatural silhouette...Nemanja Matic of Manchester United tries to keep his arms out of the way as David Luiz of Chelsea crosses

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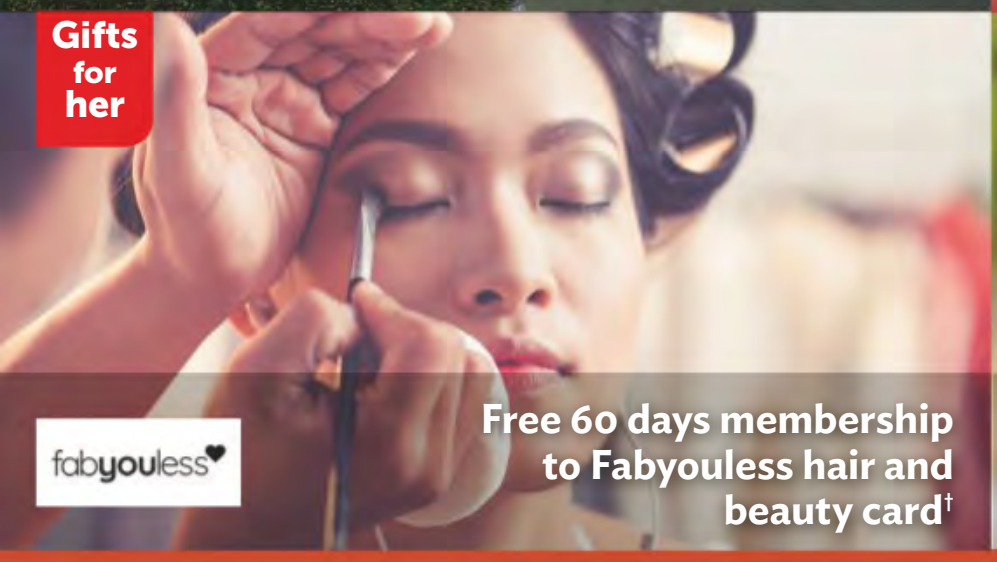

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Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The pressing questions over Bielsa's energy

It seemed to be happening again as Leeds United lost 1-0 at Queens Park Rangers – their fifth defeat in 10 games. Was this what everybody had expected would happen? After all, the history of Marcelo Bielsa's managerial career is littered with promising starts followed by late-season collapses.

It happened at Athletic Bilbao. It happened at Marseille. And it even happened at his first club, Newell's Old Boys, who won just nine games in the whole of 1991 – in between claiming the Argentinian Apertura in 1990 and the Clausura in 1992.

Historically, Bielsa's football has proved too intense to sustain over a full season and this was always the question lurking in the background when he joined Leeds in the summer.

Within weeks of taking the job he had become a messianic figure, inspiring hope where for so long there had been none. He was eccentric and stubborn, and he got his team playing thrilling football. The absurdity of "Spygate" – a man stood on public land, looking over a fence – and the hysterical reaction from certain sections of English football only added to his popularity.

But always there was a nagging doubt: could football like Bielsa's really be maintained over the full 46 games of a Championship season?

Energy...Patrick Bamford scores Leeds' third goal against West Brom

> "What our team has shown in every game is that we have an excess of energy"
>
> Leeds United manager Marcelo Bielsa

When Leeds lost at Loftus Road, Bielsa must have expected the questions. Were Leeds suffering a decline in energy levels? Was the familiar pattern repeating? His response was unusually spiky.

"Your question does not have any basis because if you watch the game you can see that this team has much energy," he said. "What our team has shown in every game is that we have an excess of energy.

"It's clear that you don't know what you are talking about, because if there is something this team doesn't lack it is energy. If you look at the figures you can see that if there is a problem that this team has, it is not a lack of energy."

While that might not have seemed especially significant, as managers often snap in press conferences after a disappointing result, Bielsa returned to the issue in his programme notes for Leeds' next game, at home to West Bromwich Albion, reassuring fans that energy levels are fine. Which does perhaps suggest somebody protesting too much, as though this is an issue about which Bielsa is sensitive.

Whether he is right or not, it cannot be doubted that he believes what he says. What exactly the figures are he references is unclear, though the Argentinian almost certainly has more information to judge such issues than any other manager in the division.

A crude guide to how hard a team is pressing is to look at how many tackles they are making. Leeds have averaged 19.5 this season but made 24 against QPR. They then made 33 in beating West Brom 4-0 the following Friday, a game that featured one of those GIF-able clips of four players charging at an opponent who has the ball. Leeds, so it would appear, are as fit as ever.

Except that it's not quite as simple as that.

There are many reasons why a side might make a lot of tackles. It may be that they are pressing hard and high, denying their opponents any time on the ball. Or it may be simply that they are squandering possession a lot.

Leeds have had 59.5 per cent possession this season, more than any other Championship side. They are also fourth for passing accuracy, which means the fact they top the tackles-attempted chart isn't because they give the ball away a lot. That said, both possession and pass success rate were

Eccentric and stubborn... Marcelo Bielsa

down against West Brom.

When Dynamo Kiev coach Viktor Maslov first introduced pressing in the mid-sixties it led to a campaign in the Moscow press insisting "we don't need this kind of football".

Witnessing an intense level of pressing clearly stimulates a response, but is it useful? Perhaps it intimidates opponents and gets the crowd going, but it's hard to see how that can possibly be efficient.

But there is a more fundamental question and that is why, when Bielsa sides have so often faded in the past, should this time be any different?

Are we to believe that, at 63, he has suddenly learned a major lesson and tempered his idealism, that Leeds are not being pushed quite so hard? Bielsa has paid tribute to his conditioning coaches, and perhaps they have done a remarkable job, but physical fitness, which can be monitored, is only part of it.

Ex-Newell's midfielder Juan Manuel Llop says Bielsa's methods "provoke a certain level of tiredness; not just physical tiredness but also mental and emotional

Effort...Leeds swamp Swansea's Bersant Celina

tiredness because the competition level is so high that it's difficult to keep up with it after a period of time".

Statistical analysis struggles to expose the imaginative weariness that means possession is not turned into chances, or the inner fatigue that prevents a side scrapping to the final minute.

Bielsa has had a huge impact on modern football and there is barely an elite-level coach who has not in some way been influenced by him. But, in its purest form, his philosophy has never been sustainable over the nine months of a European season.

Leeds may yet prove the exception, but with a fifth of the campaign still to play, any doubts about sustainability are entirely valid. And those doubts are, in part, rooted in the limits of stats to explain football. WS

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 NEW TAKEAWAY KIT

Chilean top-flight side O'Higgins fell foul of the league authorities at the start of the new season for wearing fast-food inspired shirt numbers in their opening game against Huachipato.

Following a deal with McDonalds, O'Higgins' pink shirts had numbers represented by chips, with a dollop of ketchup accentuating each number.

However, the Asociacion Nacional de Futbol Profesional claimed the shirt numbers were illegible from a distance and on television, and said they would sanction the club, who lost 2-1.

Fast food...(above) O'Higgins' chips

Blackballed... Jadon Sancho of Borussia Dortmund

2 SCORING BEHIND BARS

Pavel Mamaev, who is on remand in prison along with Alexander Kokorin, scored seven goals in a six-a-side game arranged in the Moscow detention centre where the two Russian international players are awaiting trial for their involvement in a brawl last year.

Playing on a snowy, fenced-off area against fellow detainees, Mamaev wore no 17, the same number he wears for his club Krasnodar. To even things up, Mamaev played one half for each team.

Kokorin missed the game because of a knee injury.

3 DERBY BREAKOUT

Ten prisoners at a jail in Portugal tried to use the Porto v Benfica *clasico* as cover for an escape plan.

Hoping the prison guards would be distracted by the evening's game, the inmates dug a hole in a cell wall.

The breakout was foiled by two guards who ignored the match and uncovered the plot while on their rounds.

4 NEW BALLS PLEASE

Bundesliga fans protested at the recent Nuremberg v Borussia Dortmund match by throwing black tennis balls on to the pitch.

The match was halted twice as fans took a stand against Monday night Bundesliga matches, which will now be abolished from the 2021-22 season.

5 WEIRD BEARD INJURY

Bordeaux midfielder Younousse Sankhare was recently sidelined due to "beard implant complications" after undergoing a procedure at a private facility to boost his facial hair.

Substitute...paper numbers in Brazil

6 PAPER SUBS

The assistant referee had to hold up A4 paper with numbers printed on after CONMEBOL forgot the electronic substitution boards for the Libertadores Cup game between Brazil's Atletico Mineiro and Defensor of Uruguay in Belo Horizonte.

Gaol scorer... Pavel Mamaev

"These aren't children, they are grown men and must give their all. There are no more excuses...if they were signed by Roma and earn what they earn, then they have to prove they are worthy of Roma"

Claudio Ranieri lays down the law after returning to coach *I Giallorossi*

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Lined up... Jaap Stam

EUROPE

ZINEDINE ZIDANE returned as coach of Real Madrid, replacing Santiago Solari (*see p28*), while **FRAN ESCRIBA** took over from Miguel Cardoso at Celta Vigo.

Former Liverpool and Swansea City manager **BRENDAN RODGERS** returned to the Premier League with Leicester City, replacing Claude Puel. His post at Celtic was filled by **NEIL LENNON**, who took charge of the Scottish Premiership leaders for a second time.

SENOL GUNES will take over as coach of Turkey for a second time, as of June 1.

Portuguese coach **PAULO SOUSA** replaced Ricardo Gomes at Ligue 1 side Bordeaux.

JAAP STAM will leave PEC Zwolle at the end of the current Eredivisie season and replace Giovanni Van Bronckhorst as coach of Feyenoord.

New challenge... Paulo Sousa

Former Linfield boss **WARREN FEENEY** took charge of Ards, who were bottom of the NIFL Premiership, until the end of the season.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Celta Vigo, Sevilla and Athletic Bilbao boss **EDUARDO BERIZZO** was appointed national coach of Paraguay after Juan Carlos Osorio resigned for family reasons after just five months in the job.

National job... Eduardo Berizzo

CONCACAF

Uruguayan **FABIAN COITO** left his post as his country's Under-20 boss to become national coach of Honduras.

Mexican side Toluca appointed **JOSE LUIS REAL** to replace Argentinian coach Hernan Cristante until the end of the season, with the side 15th in the Liga MX.

Winner...Juan Carlos Garrido

ASIA

Spaniard **JUAN CARLOS GARRIDO**, who led Raja Casablanca to victory in the 2018 CAF Confederation Cup, was appointed coach of UAE's Al Ain.

ERWIN KOEMAN succeeded Dutch compatriot Pim Verbeek as coach of Oman. Interim boss **FAJR IBRAHIM** was handed the permanent job with Syria.

Chilean **JOSE LUIS SIERRA** replaced Slaven Bilic as coach of Saudi Pro League side Al Ittihad.

OCEANIA

Northern Irishman **PAUL MUNSTER**, who won two trophies in seven months while in charge of Indian top-flight side Minerva Punjab, was appointed national coach of Vanuatu.

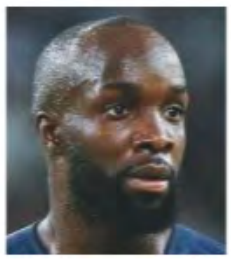
Back... Claudio Ranieri

Roma return for Ranieri

Sacked after just 106 days as manager of Premier League strugglers Fulham, **CLAUDIO RANIERI** took charge of Roma until the end of the season after they dismissed Eusebio Di Francesco following their Champions League exit to Porto. As part of the clear-out, Roma's sporting director Monchi also left the club.

Ranieri, who was previously in charge of Roma from 2009 to 2011, agreed a short-term contract until the end of the season.

"For football, I gave a lot. Thanks to football, I received a lot. I did not do everything perfectly but I did it with heart, passion and kindness"



Lassana Diarra calls time on a career ravaged by injury

Appointments, sackings and loans

EUROPE

Serie B side Venezia dismissed former Italy keeper **WALTER ZENGA** as coach after a run of four defeats in five games.

MAROUANE FELLAINI, who now plays for Shandong Luneng in China, announced his international retirement at the age of 31. He won 87 caps for Belgium and appeared at two World Cups.

SOUTH AMERICA

Colombian coach **LEONEL ALVAREZ** was sacked by Libertad despite guiding the Paraguayan side into the Libertadores Cup group stage. Alvarez denied reports that his departure was connected to allegations of an affair with the wife of star midfielder Edgar Benitez.

CONCACAF

Real Salt Lake goalkeeper **NICK RIMANDO** – who will turn 40 in June and holds MLS records for wins, clean sheets and games played – will retire at the end of the season.

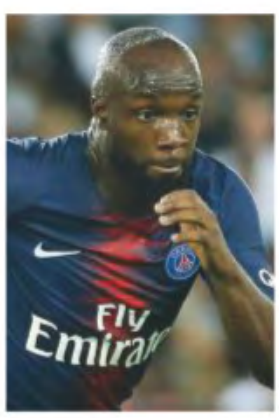
AFRICA

Appointed in July 2017 for his fourth stint as national coach, Botswana sacked **DAVID BRIGHT** following the team's poor run in qualification for the African Nations Cup, while Belgian coach **SVEN VANDENBROECK** parted company with Zambia after they failed to make the finals.

Rumours... Leonel Alvarez

Diarra calls it a day

Ex-France midfielder **LASSANA DIARRA** announced his retirement after reaching agreement with Paris Saint-Germain to release him from his contract.



The 33-year-old made only three Ligue 1 appearances this season after struggling with injuries throughout his career.

He began with Le Havre and then played for Chelsea, Arsenal, Portsmouth, Real Madrid, Anzhi Makhachkala, Lokomotiv Moscow, Marseille and UAE's Al Jazira.

He made 34 senior appearances for France.

OBITUARIES

Captain...Eric Caldow

Eric CALDOW (1934-2019)
Former Rangers skipper who made 407 appearances for the club and was capped 40 times by Scotland, captaining his country on 14 occasions. He won five Scottish league titles, plus two Scottish Cups and three Scottish League Cups.

Carlos FLORES (1974-2018)
The youngest of 11 children who were effectively abandoned by their parents and left to cope for themselves, the midfielder won just two caps despite being described as "the best player in the history of Peruvian football" by former Argentina coach Jorge Sampaoli.

According to Sampaoli: "He was Maradona, but the truth is that he didn't know how to be Maradona."

However, problems with cocaine and alcohol meant the player – who was "a complex case" and "damaged goods" in the words of Sampaoli – never fulfilled his potential.

"He couldn't stand any kind of system," said a former coach, Cesar Gonzales. "No one ever managed to impose rules on him."

Spells in Saudi Arabia, Greece, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia were invariably brief, and before long he was always back in Peru, usually with the Sport Boys, where he started his professional career and played for eight separate spells between 1991 and 2010.

Tim Vickery

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

More revelations about Qatar corruption but what good will they do?

Full marks to *The Sunday Times*' Insight team for another masterly expose of the malfeasance of FIFA and Qatar, who were so outrageously allotted the World Cup finals of 2022.

But, alas, we have to wonder what ultimate good it will do. In other words, is there any palpable chance of those World Cup finals being taken away from a tiny country so manifestly unsuitable to enjoy them?

Already Qatar has been indulged to the extent of changing the timing of the tournament from its summer, when it would be as hot as a furnace, to the cooler winter weeks, when it will necessitate halting the European club season in its tracks, with all the inevitable chaos.

Given the knowledge that it would be impossible to stage the tournament in the roasting days of a Qatari summer, it is amazing that the competition was ever awarded to Qatar at all. But, ominously, there seemed hardly a squeak of protest from UEFA and the European clubs, while a couple of the most distinguished former World Cup stars were seduced into supporting Qatar's claim. It seems wretchedly like a betrayal and one can but hazard a guess as to just what induced such splendours of the game to betray it.

The latest *Sunday Times* investigation gives abundant, repugnant chapter and verse of what has happened. Needless to say, vast sums of money were involved. And predictably enough, television rights were intimately involved.

The previous *Sunday Times* revelations were so damning that you might have thought stern action should long since have been taken. So will the latest shocking and well-researched revelations have any more of an effect? This though some of the most deplorable FIFA figures have been forced out of the picture.

Outrage...Sepp Blatter (above) announces Qatar (below) will host the 2022 World Cup

Qatar may be tiny, it may have no football background or standing at all, but it has got minerals and therefore money in super abundance.

I would be a great deal more optimistic about action being taken if it had not been for the passivity with which the major European nations accepted the decision to load the tournament into the thick of their own season. You might say that they could scarcely concur with any attempt to play the tournament in the roasting summer, but by the same token it is surely astonishing that they should meekly in the first instance agree to stage the tournament in Qatar at all.

Then you think of all those years they allowed the appalling Joao Havelange to reign as the president of FIFA and it is all too tempting to abandon hope. WS

VAR will bring greater justice

No system, however mechanically sophisticated, can guarantee justice in football, but the VAR innovation seems likely to be largely effective – though not wholly without controversy.

A former senior referee has cast doubt on the VAR decision which gave Manchester United their breathlessly decisive recent European goal in Paris. Interpretation of what actually happened in any controversial situation will always be a delicate matter. To err, after all, is human – but the possibility of injustice is surely hugely reduced by the new system.

You think of all the past notorious injustices which could have been avoided were VAR then in existence. Not least the shocking "Hand of God" goal scored by Diego Maradona for Argentina against England in the Azteca Stadium in the World Cup. An inexperienced African officiating triumvirate contrived not to see anything and England would be beaten and eliminated.

Other injustices come to mind. As long ago as the 1932 FA Cup Final at Wembley, Arsenal were the hapless victims against Newcastle United. The ball had palpably run over the goal line when Newcastle pulled it back and Jack Allen headed a crucial goal, the Gunners' defence having stopped in the belief that a goal kick would be given.

Then there was the disallowed 2010 World Cup goal scored by Frank Lampard for England against Germany in South Africa, the ball having crossed the goal line by a comfortable margin, only for it to be denied and Germany to go on and win comfortably.

Goals change what you might call the psychology of games and had that one been given, as it so plainly should have been, would England have avoided what turned into a crushing defeat?

VAR surely means a greater quality of justice even if it cannot be infallible.

Controversy...Presnel Kimpembe of PSG is judged to have handled a shot from Manchester United's Diogo Dalot

Steward's crime added insult to Grealish injury

Was Jack Grealish kicked by a steward at St Andrews?

Yes, we know that he had previously been attacked by a lout of a Birmingham City fan, who was duly hauled away and has been properly been banned for life by the club which, in his perverted way, he claims to support.

But the steward's outrage was simply adding insult to injury and this surely was a matter for the police.

West Brom's Moore surely deserves another chance

West Bromwich Albion's sudden, unexpected and oddly erratic sacking of Darren Moore as their manager bewilders. Hard not to feel sympathy for that unusual figure, a black manager.

He took over late last season with the team in trouble and even if he could not save them from relegation he steadied the ship and this season had more than decent results in the Championship.

Made full manager at the end of the last campaign, he then found himself without several key players: Jonny Evans, Ben Foster and James McClean. Even so, he left the team in a commendable fourth position. What more was expected of him? Automatic promotion, I suppose, even though his squad had been so substantially weakened.

If he now feels disappointed and embittered who could rationally blame him? I hope he finds another club soon for he is clearly a manager of quality.

In the running as his successor at The Hawthorns is Slavisa Jokanovic, whom Fulham controversially sacked early this season. The club spent, for better or arguably worse, £100million in the close season but he was not in charge of their transfer policy.

Sacked... Darren Moore

Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

SLOVAKIA

Viktor Orban widens his net

Hungary's controversial prime minister is using football to cement a popular power base

Oszkar Vilagi watches pensively from his VIP box. Five years after buying FC DAC, his club are playing the biggest game in their history.

Their €14 million academy is open and a €29m stadium renovation is complete. A pig was slaughtered that morning and made into sausages at a pre-game fan-fest. Supporters have travelled from Budapest and Hungarian triple Olympic swimming gold-medallist Katinka Hosszu takes the ceremonial kick-off.

As the national anthem of Hungary rings out, Hungary's third-most-popular team begin their first game since the winter break.

However, DAC are not Hungarian. They are from Dunajska Streda in southern Slovakia, which was part of Hungary until the end of World War Two. Around 10 per cent of Slovakians speak Hungarian, mostly in the Zitny Ostrov region, where Dunajska Streda is the biggest town and FC DAC 1904 Dunajska Streda are the locals' pride and joy.

Only 22,000 people live in Dunajska Streda, but a crowd of 12,135 watch DAC take on Slovan Bratislava in February in a top-of-the table clash.

Slovan are the establishment side and the only team from the former Czechoslovakia to win a European title, beating Barcelona in the 1969 Cup-winners Cup Final. Apart from the 1987 Czechoslovak Cup, DAC have not won any major silverware, yet with an average attendance of 7,500 they are Slovakia's most popular club. Among Hungarians, only the national team and Ferencvaros attract more support.

A regular spectator at DAC – though he is absent for the Slovan game – is Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, who more than any European leader knows how to use football to cement a popular power base.

According to investigative news website *Atlatszo*, by next year Orban's government will have built or renovated at least 32 football stadiums at a cost of €709m to the Hungarian taxpayer. And that spending does not stop at national borders.

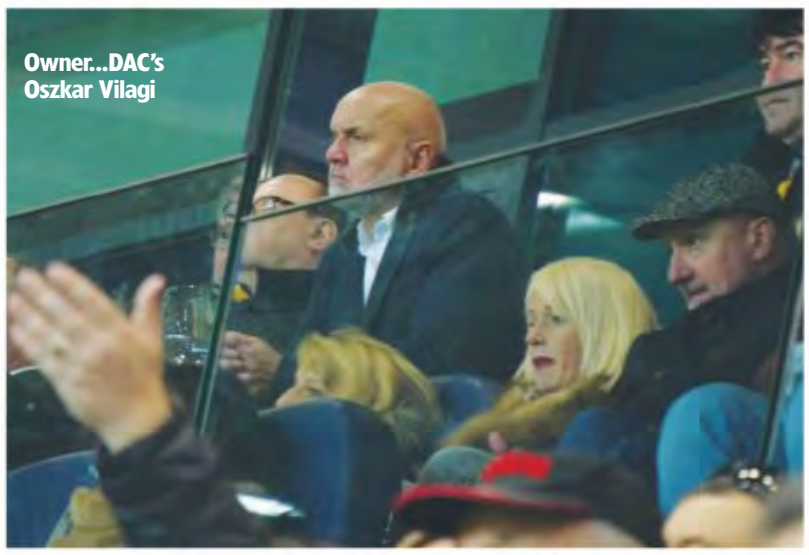
Atlatszo has discovered that his government is funding a swathe of football clubs in Hungarian-speaking regions in the neighbouring countries of Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Slovenia and Slovakia, with the money coming through the Hungarian Football Federation and the Bethlen Gabor Fund, a state body used to aid ethnic Hungarians living elsewhere.

> "We want to be in the first three every year and in international competitions, but the players here need to have ambition to play at a big club. Our club is a bridge to the big clubs"
>
> **DAC owner Oszkar Vilagi**

DAC have received €7.4m, and while details of the funding shocked some in Hungary, few were surprised in Dunajska Streda, where Vilagi is a long-time friend of Orban.

Vilagi was born in Dunajska Streda, and after training as a lawyer he went into politics before investing in businesses: from shops and the town's hotel – which was DAC's headquarters until the new stadium opened – to the oil-refinery business Slovnaft.

In 2002, Hungarian energy giant MOL took a majority stake in Slovnaft



Owner...DAC's Oszkar Vilagi

Crunch game...DAC prepare to take on Slovan Bratislava

and Vilagi joined their board. In 2011, Orban's government took a 21 per cent stake in MOL. Five years later, Vilagi stepped in to buy DAC from an Iranian group which had dragged the club into a mire of match-fixing problems.

Vilagi's personal wealth is estimated at around €150m, but he is not wasting his money on players' wages. The stadium and the academy are the focus – and MOL sponsors both.

This sponsorship and the Hungarian government money are simply another source of funding for Vilagi, who says: "The border is open. We go to Hungary for players, too. We don't care about that if we want to be successful."

FIFA's Forward fund is providing €350,000 a year between 2017 and 2021 for youth development, while the Slovak federation contributed €2.9m to the academy and stadium. As part of these agreements, national youth team games will be played at DAC's academy. A special changing room has even been built for these matches – and decorated in Slovak colours.

DAC do buy players – such as Erick Davis, who joined in 2015 from Sporting San Miguelito in his native Panama and last year became the first DAC player to feature at a World Cup – but Vilagi's plan is based on the academy.

DAC want to be sustainable by developing and selling players, and Vilagi adds: "We want to be in the first three every year and in the international competitions, but the players here need to have ambition to play at a big club. Our club is a bridge to the big clubs."

DAC currently have a tie-up with Wolverhampton Wanderers, who have sent three players – Daniel Csoka, Connor Ronan and Christian Herc – on loan to the club, but sales have already begun. In January, 21-year-old Ivory Coast striker Vakoun Issouf Bayo went to Celtic for a club record fee of €2.25m – helping to significantly boost DAC's turnover, which was €4.3m in 2017-18.

Threat...Slovan attempt to keep out DAC's Kristian Kostrna

While Slovak is not even spoken at the MOL Arena on match days, the club knows it treads a fine line. The Hungarian national anthem is not played officially but sung by DAC fans straight after kick-off. Only when the last line is sung do the home fans, including most of the press box, take their seats.

"The minority of Hungarian-speaking people in this country will come here but we do not want to limit ourselves to that," says DAC's head of match operations, Martin Tournyai. "Everyone is welcome because we are in a province of just 80,000 people. That is a problem."

Vilagi initially employed family members at DAC and then started taking on whip-smart young graduates like Tournyai with sports-management credentials gained overseas.

One of Tournyai's first jobs was to actively engage with the fans to improve the stadium experience. And his success is evident in the atmosphere, which belies the size of the ground.

Second-placed DAC trailed leaders Slovan by eight points before kick-off and gave away a soft penalty to lose 1-0.

"Our average age is just 22; you can see the difference in ages between the two teams on the pitch," said DAC's German coach Peter Hyballa after the game while conceding that his side's title hopes were over.

> "We have a few small clubs that are like a village and every season there is a problem as they don't have the money"
>
> **Players' union president Jan Mucha**

Bidding to win the league for the first time since 2014, Slovan have invested heavily on players, spending over €1m on Slovenian striker Andraz Sporar, with Hungarian midfielder David Holman and Slovenian defender Kenan Bajric costing €600,000 each.

In a league where half the players earn less than €1,000 a month according to the players union, Slovan's highest paid player, Sporar, is on €60,000 a month while the only Slovak starting regularly is goalkeeper Dominik Greif.

But for all his spending, Slovan owner Ivan Kmotrik is hugely unpopular and last season attendances fell to an average of just 1,629 as fans boycotted games.

A decade ago, Kmotrik demolished Slovan's old ground and promised a new one that is only now materialising, and then only after he persuaded the government to let him build a new €75m national stadium for them – mostly with their money.

In between, Kmotrik's land dealings virtually destroyed Bratislava's two other leading clubs, Petrzalka and Inter.

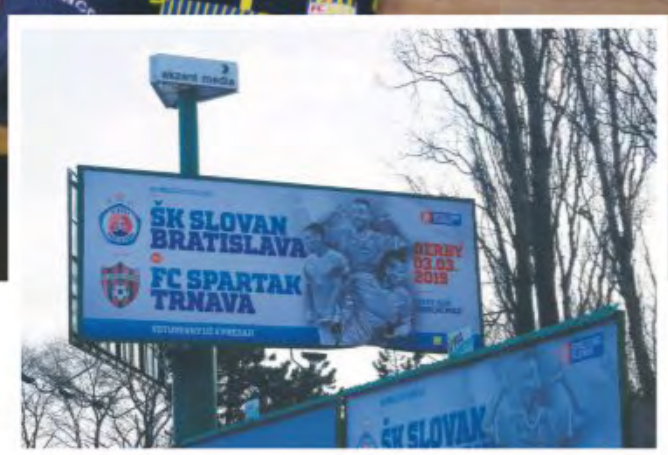
Playing as Artmedia – the name of

MOVERS & SHAKERS

- **JAN KOVACIK**
  Elected president of the Slovak FA in 2010, re-elected in 2014 and again last year.
- **PAVEL HAPAL**
  Took Slovakia to the 2017 Euro Under-21s and became national coach in 2018.
- **IVAN KMOTRIK**
  Started out selling currency on the street but interests now range from TV channel TAS to ownership of Slovan Bratislava.
- **OSZKAR VILAGI**
  Hungarian-speaker who owns 90 per cent of DAC and is worth up to €150m.
- **MARTIN SKRTEL**
  National captain who played for Liverpool and is now with Fenerbahce in Turkey.

Coach...Pavel Hapal

Photos: FC DAC 1904 & Steve Menary



Changing... (top) DAC's new dressing room; (above) Slovan's old ground

a Kmotrik company – Petrzalka reached the group stage of the Champions League in 2005-06, but when the club's ground was sold and demolished in 2012 they were left homeless and so folded. Inter were also left without a home and collapsed after Kmotrik bought their old ground as a temporary base for Slovan, who played there until the end of last year, when they moved into the new national stadium.

The collapse of Inter, Petrzalka and Kosice from Slovakia's second-biggest city has left a vacuum and those bigger clubs have been replaced by small teams with tiny grounds and very few fans.

"We have a few small clubs that are like a village and every season there is a problem as they don't have the money," says players' union president Jan Mucha. "Slovak football is all about the owners. If they don't want to pay, they don't pay."

Mucha sought to counter this by setting up a union a few years ago, and the owners clubbed together to sell TV rights collectively for around €1 million a season.

Unlike many countries, the Super Liga owners all get on and Slovan's owner even has a box at the DAC stadium.

When the first phase opened, Vilagi's guests included Kmotrick, Spartak Trvnava owner Vladimir Poor, the former state president Ivan Gasparovic – and Viktor Orban.

While the emphasis on DAC's Hungarian roots meets some opposition, the Super Liga needs its best attended club more than ever. Vilagi knows that. And so does Viktor Orban as he seeks to expand his sphere of influence past Hungary's borders. WS

SUPER LIGA 2018-19

FC DAC 1904
The club from the tiny Hungarian-speaking town of Dunajska Streda were promoted to the top flight in 2013 after winning 2.Liga.

FC NITRA
Founded in 1909 and one of Slovakia's oldest clubs, but their best performance to date was third place in 2008. Controlled by a security company run by local oligarch Miroslav Bodor.

MFK RUZOMBEROK
Won their first league title in 2006. Their majority shareholder, Milan Fil'o, is said to be one of the richest people in Slovakia.

FK SENICA
Founded in 1921 but have never won a major trophy and attract crowds of less than 800. Struggling this season, owner Vladimir Levarsky wants to sell.

SKF SERED
After 104 years, the club won its first major honour in 2018, taking the second-tier title. The club is owned by Robert Starecek.

SK SLOVAN BRATISLAVA
Slovak's biggest and most successful club, founded in 1919 they have a turnover of €9.1m a year and have been champions 12 times.

FC SPARTAK TRNAVA
League winners last season, Slovakia's second-best supported club average 6,700 fans but owner Vladimir Poor has never enjoyed much rapport and after 25 years in charge he has put the club up for sale.

AS TRENCIN
Owned since 2007 by former Holland international Tschen La Ling. Double winners in 2015 and 2016, they are the only Super Liga club with an outside sponsor.

FK ZELEZIARNE PODBREZOVA
Famed for their youth programme and owned by Vladimir Sotak, who runs the local steel company. With attendances below 1,000 they have the league's smallest playing budget.

MFK ZEMPLIN MICHALOVCE
Sole representatives from the east, they were promoted as second division winners in 2015. Owner is construction magnate Jan Sabol.

MSK ZILINA
Winners of seven titles, most recently in 2017, and owned by one of Slovakia's richest men, Jozef Antosik. Second-biggest club in financial terms with annual turnover of €8.1m.

FC ZLATE MORAVCE
Slovak Cup winners in 2007 and owned by construction magnate Viliam Ondrejka, but weak in financial terms with a turnover of just €785,000.

eyewitness

Sid Lowe reports

SPAIN

Return of the king

After the worst week in the club's history, Real Madrid persuaded Zinedine Zidane to return

Dani Carvajal summed it up in a single word but the sight of him – and of the man behind him – said so much more.

At the end of Real Madrid's 4-1 defeat against Ajax, Carvajal stood in front of the TV camera on the touchline at the Santiago Bernabeu, holding back the tears, a hollow look on his face, at a loss to explain what had just happened.

"I have never had this feeling before," he admitted. "I don't know how to explain it, this feeling is so...bad. In a week we lost it all; we lost it all at home."

That "at home" came as the confirmation of just how hard this was to believe and it really was "it all". The enormity of what had happened was

Back...Zidane

Out...Madrid concede a fourth goal to Ajax

written on Carvajal's face. Three defeats in seven days, all of them at the Santiago Bernabeu, had seen Madrid knocked out of every competition, one after the other.

First, on a Wednesday night, Barcelona had beaten them 3-0 in the semi-final, second leg of the Spanish Cup. Then on the Saturday night, Barca had beaten them 1-0 in the league, leaving Madrid 12 points behind and out of the title race. That result also put Barcelona ahead in the all-time *clasico* count for the first time in 87 years: 96-95.

Then, on the Tuesday night, Ajax had come to the Bernabeu and knocked them out of the Champions League.

European champions for the previous ▸

1,012 days their days are numbered now: 88 left and counting down. By the time the Final comes around, 14km across town at the Metropolitano, they won't be in it.

"Here lies the team that made history," said the cover of *Marca*. No wonder the touchline reporter suggested that this was the end of an era.

"I don't see it like that, but it is true that this season is practically finished for us," said Carvajal. "We have to be professional, we have to stand up, we can't hide. We know that we have had a shit season and that's it."

As Carvajal delivered his judgement, he felt his voice go and tears breaking through, so without another word he turned and walked away down the tunnel. As he went, he walked past Santi Solari, the Real Madrid coach who had stood motionless in the background all the way through the interview, not moving an inch, glazed eyes lost somewhere in the distance, transfixed nowhere in particular. He knew it was over. "We're sad, we're gutted," he said. "We did all we could, but it was not enough."

Down in the dressing room, an argument began. The club's president Florentino Perez accused the players – largely the same players who won three European Cups in three years, four in five – of lacking professionalism, of letting them down. Sergio Ramos, the club captain who had missed the match through a suspension he had deliberately sought, thinking the tie was all over after a 2-1 first leg win, stood up to him and defended his team-mates.

Ramos said that they were victims of the club's poor planning, which had left them lacking a striker or the strength in depth that they needed. The voices got louder, the shouting began. At one point, Perez threatened to kick Ramos out. "Pay me and I'll go," the captain shot back.

Inside the stadium there had largely been resignation, no great reaction. Outside the stadium, egged on by TV cameras, fans were chanting for changes: they wanted a clean out, a purge. They also wanted the normal things that fans tend to want in these situations: new signings, more superstars, an iron fist, a manager to whip them into shape.

In charge...Zidane takes training again

Some chanted for Jose Mourinho, the kind of personality that would come in and tear it all up, start again, not indulge the egos. And yet they knew the risks there too; last time with the Portuguese it had ended badly.

Inside the stadium, a phone call was made, but it was not to Mourinho – or not only to him. They rang Zinedine Zidane too and asked him to come back right away.

Madrid already knew that they would need a new coach for next season; now they decided that they needed him straight away. Solari always knew that he was unlikely to make it beyond the end of the season; beaten by Ajax, he was unlikely to make it much beyond the end of the week.

As it turned out, Real Valladolid that Sunday night would be his last game.

It had probably been the worst week in Madrid's history: all three competitions gone in three home matches, eight goals conceded and just one scored. There could be no complaints, no excuses: they just weren't good enough.

So much had happened so fast and

All over...Santi Solari takes his place in the dugout as Real Madrid coach for the last time, against Real Valladolid

> "We have to stand up, we can't hide. We know that we have had a shit season and that's it"
>
> **Dani Carvajal**

yet their destruction had deep roots; the conditions for crisis went back further. Absurd though it sounds, winning the European Cup had hidden some of their problems, keeping them under wraps, giving them the sense that all was well when it wasn't.

It is also true though that winning the European Cup brought some of it out into the open; title won, tension released, some of it came to the surface, some felt an era had ended. Not against Ajax, but nine months earlier.

Madrid's 2018–19 season could be measured in numbers, in time. The figures are incredible, the speed at which it unravelled is stunning.

Barely three minutes had passed after the final whistle of the Final in Kiev last year when Cristiano Ronaldo announced that he would be leaving. Within 20 minutes Gareth Bale said that he might too. And within five days, Zinedine Zidane actually did.

"It's the right moment," Zidane had said. Alongside him, Florentino Perez was stunned.

And so, it started: more movement, more numbers. Madrid hadn't planned for Zidane leaving and they were under pressure. The men they wanted didn't want to come. How do you follow three European Cups in a row? The answer, as it turned out, was: badly. Spain's Julen Lopetegui was signed two days before the World Cup began. One hundred and thirty eight days later he was gone.

Amid talk of Antonio Conte, and with Ramos publicly saying that they were better off without an authoritarian coach, Solari was named temporary boss. Federation rules limit temporary roles to two weeks, though, so he was soon made a "permanent" appointment and given a contract until 2021, the same year that Lopetegui's runs out.

Only permanent is never permanent. Things got worse, not better.

"None of us have been at our level, myself included," Toni Kroos admitted the day before their entire season ended.

Lopetegui had lasted 138 days; Solari was sacked after 119. And then Zidane walked back in – just 284 days after walking out.

When he left, Zidane had said it might be a "see you later, not a goodbye" but he had also made it clear that there were reasons for going. "It's the right decision," he said. "I don't like losing. If I feel like I am not going to win, I have to make a change."

On his way?... Gareth Bale

Unlike most coaches he was as swift to talk about the things he had not won as the things that he had, not hiding from the fact that Madrid had finished 17 points behind Barcelona in his final season. He was aware that there were things that had to change, and he was not entirely convinced that they would.

Time proved him right and Madrid did not win. Those flaws that he foresaw were shown to be significant. At least now they were unavoidable, not hidden beneath success. Now they had to be addressed.

At Zidane's presentation most of the enquiries could be reduced to a basic question: what had changed for you to come back now if you walked away just nine months ago? And, of course, what still would?

In part, what had changed was the simple fact that he had gone and that in his absence Madrid had lost. That brought a shift in the conditions and in attitudes – among players, fans and the club. It strengthened Zidane's hand; he could get guarantees now. They needed him more than he needed them. All the more so with some pointing the finger at the president.

Asked what his first thought was when the president called him, Zidane replied: "To go back...and here I am." But he had been called when Lopetegui left too and this time it had taken him five days to actually go back. Madrid did have some convincing to do. Zidane returned with promises made on how the squad is rebuilt, and who has the final word. "Things will change," he said.

There will be arrivals – Eder Militao, from Porto, was announced within two days – and departures too. Zidane's return is bad news for Gareth Bale, for a start. Money will be spent where it wasn't before, strikers a priority.

In the long term, whether results change is yet to be seen of course. It didn't feel like it in the warm glow of his return but Zidane's time was not perfect. In the short term, things had already changed; everything had. Just Zidane's presence did that, his aura and authority, his symbolism.

For Madrid, the days that followed the loss against Ajax showed that it was not just about defeat, it has also been about the damage done: the lid had been lifted, leaks continued, relationships increasingly strained and played out in public.

Many of the problems remain but with the Frenchman's arrival a crisis had been calmed, tranquillity returning. Almost as if it hadn't happened.

It had of course, and their terrible season was over ahead of time, but tomorrow was another day.

They wore different faces now. WS

Getafe

Team from Madrid's suburbs scaling unlikely heights in La Liga

While attention focused inevitably on Barcelona's victory over Real Madrid in the second *clasico* of the season – a result that all but confirmed Barca's retention of the title – Getafe have emerged as the story of the Spanish season.

Their rise from the second tier has been remarkable. Promoted back into the top flight in 2017, a year after being relegated, the team from Madrid's suburbs went into the international break in fourth place in La Liga.

In February, goals from Jaime Mata and Jorge Molina helped them beat Rayo Vallecano 2-1 in one of the top flight's many Madrid derbies to reach their highest-ever league placing, ahead of Alaves, Sevilla and Valencia.

Based 13km south of Madrid's centre, and with an average attendance of just 9,874 – the third smallest in La Liga after Eibar (5,416) and Huesca (4,733) – Getafe have been dubbed the "Spanish Watford". But such a comparison is unfair; Watford's Italian owners have used connections and Premier League TV money to sign players from Barcelona, Juventus, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur. Getafe, by contrast, are a team of misfits, rejects and bargain purchases.

Mathieu Flamini, the 35-year-old former France international, may have played in the Champions League for Arsenal but he signed for Getafe as a

Determined...Damian Suarez holds off Sergio Leon of Real Betis

Productive...Jaime Mata (right) and Jorge Molina

free agent in February last year, having spent more than six months without a club after leaving Crystal Palace.

Fellow midfielder Nemanja Maksimovic was edged out by Valencia, while keeper David Soria, not wanted by Sevilla, has defied predictions that he would struggle to replace Vicente Guaita, who left for Crystal Palace last summer. By mid March he was second only to Atletico Madrid's Jan Oblak in the race for the Zamora trophy – the prize that is awarded to the Liga goalkeeper with the lowest goals-to-games ratio.

> "A team of thugs doesn't reach this high in the league"
> **Getafe striker Jorge Molina**

Other signings have included Uruguayan defender Leandro Cabrera from relegated Cotrone in Italy, and Dimitri Foulquier, who is on loan from Watford after spending last season at Strasbourg. Full-back Damian Suarez previously suffered relegation in successive seasons with Gijon and Elche.

Togolese defender Djene Dakonam cost €2.5m from Belgian side Sint-Truiden in 2017 but has more than held his own and has been linked with a move to Barcelona.

As for their strike force, Mata and Molina have been a revelation; only Barca's pairing of Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez has been a more productive partnership. Mata's 13 goals by the middle of March was a record for a player in his first season in Spain's top flight and took him to the brink of a Spain call-up. The 36-year-old Molina, who only came to professional football at the age of 25, became the oldest player to score 10 league goals in a Liga season since Ferenc Puskas.

The pair have been brought together by coach Jose Bordalas, a veteran of the second tier who led Alaves to promotion in 2016 – only to be fired because his methods were thought to be effective in the Segunda but deemed unsuitable for the top flight.

The 4-4-2 system employed by Bordalas tends to feature high pressing, direct passing and quick counter-attacks that take the pressure off the defensive backline. While critics have focused on Getafe's physical approach and lack of possession football, Bordalas has been quick to stress the amount of work undertaken on the training ground.

"I've never put more hours in when coaching a team before," he explains.

And the results have been sensational. When Bordalas took charge of Getafe in September 2016 the team were second bottom of the second tier. But they went up, finished eighth in their first season back in the top tier and are now fourth.

The players have clearly bought into Bordalas' wholehearted approach, with Portuguese left-back Vitorino Atunes stating: "We work to the limit, and you can see that in the games. We play the way we train.

"The team is like a family. You should see the relationship between the team, the coaching staff and the fans."

Dismissing critics of the team's playing style, Molina insists: "There are no egos in this team. A team of thugs doesn't reach this high in the league."

Getafe's direct approach will be tested if and when they take part in a European campaign next term. Both their previous European adventures were in the Europa League: beating AEK Athens and Benfica before losing to Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals in 2008, but failing to get out of their group in 2010.

Much has happened since then; relegation followed by an immediate return to the top tier and now, against the odds, a challenge for a Champions League place.

John Holmesdale

Wholehearted... Jose Bordalas

Bruno Lage

Benfica coach takes "new boss bounce" to the extreme

At the turn of the year, Benfica fans had all but written off the season. A limp 2-0 defeat at Portimonense saw the Eagles drop to fourth in the standings, with Porto way ahead of them at the summit.

Cue the sacking of Rui Vitoria and the entrance of Bruno Lage, with the B-team boss put in temporary charge of the seniors while president Luis Filipe Vieira tried his best to persuade Jose Mourinho to return to the club where he had started his career as a head coach.

However, Vieira's failure to bring Mourinho back to Portugal proved a blessing in disguise.

The turnaround under Bruno Lage was immediate and spectacular, both in terms of results and the quality of football played.

Remarkably, just two months later, Benfica had rocketed to the top of the table on the back of nine straight wins in the league, culminating in an outstanding display at Porto and a first league victory at the Estadio do Dragao for almost a decade. Without a single reinforcement in January, he had got his side playing bright, enterprising, joyful, attacking football – in stark contrast to his predecessor.

> "I want to thank my players...because they are making a coach out of me"
> **Bruno Lage**

The comparison between the two coaches in the biggest matches is particularly striking. Bruno Lage won three out of four games against Sporting and Porto, compared to Vitoria's three wins in 16 *classicos*. To put it another way, the new man clocked up as many victories against the toughest domestic opposition in two months as Vitoria managed in three and a half years.

"We've gone top but it doesn't change our aim – which is to win all our games and continue to work hard until the end of the season to achieve our main objective: to win the championship," said the scorer of the winning goal against Porto, Rafa Silva.

Silva is one of a host of players who have been utterly transformed under the new boss. Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Pires was considered an expensive flop after his signing from La Liga outfit Leganes, while Andreas Samaris had rarely convinced. However, the pair have formed an admirable partnership at the base of the midfield in Bruno Lage's 4-4-2, the solid platform enabling the likes of Haris Seferovic, Silva and brilliant teenager Joao Felix to wreak havoc among opposition defences.

"We know exactly what we have to do, and this gives us tranquillity in our day-to-day work and in the matches," added Silva, lifting the lid of what is the most obvious explanation behind the extraordinary impact of the coach.

Having worked in Benfica's youth set-up for 15 years, interrupted by spells in the United Arab Emirates and England (as assistant to Carlos Carvalhal), Bruno Lage knows exactly what each player is capable of and what role gets the best out of them. He has shown an ability to transmit his message perfectly.

It came as no surprise, therefore, that he managed to seamlessly integrate several graduates from Benfica's renowned Seixal academy into the first team. The supremely talented Felix is hogging the headlines, but Francisco Ferreira, Florentino Luis and Gedson Fernandes are other exciting prospects.

Winner...Benfica's Rafa Silva scores against Porto

Setubal native Bruno Lage insists on sharing the platitudes with which he

has been showered. "I want to thank my players for the attitude they have shown in training and their desire to form a team like you saw today," said the 42-year-old after the Porto victory.

"I want to thank them because they are making a coach out of me. I've said the merit is all theirs and what we have done these past two months has only been possible because of the work they are putting in."

Benfica president Vieira has said that his biggest regret was sacking Fernando Santos after a poor run of results in 2007, suggesting that changing coaches during the season is always a bad idea. What has happened in the first two months of 2019 will surely make him reappraise his position.

It's early days in the Bruno Lage era, but Benfica fans are hoping this is just the start and appointing a new coach is a task Vieira will not have to consider for many a long year.

Tom Kundert

Backing... Bruno Lage acknowledges the Benfica fans

Pierre Ndaye Mulamba

Legend whose last days were spent in poverty

Star...Mulamba is on bottom row, far left

One of Africa's most fearsome forwards in his day, Pierre Ndaye Mulamba holds the record for the most goals scored in an African Nations Cup finals, finding the target nine times in five games as a 25-year-old when Zaire (now DR Congo) won the tournament in 1974.

Yet, in life, and especially so in the years leading up to his demise, he existed almost entirely as a cautionary tale, a portrait of how not to treat a legend.

Success at the Nations Cup proved to be a poisoned chalice, with members of the squad rewarded with the Order of Merit, the country's highest national honour, plus cars and houses, but also barred from leaving the country and therefore unable to pursue a professional career abroad.

> Mulamba existed almost entirely as a cautionary tale, a portrait of how not to treat a legend

At the 1974 World Cup in Germany, he was sent off in Zaire's second game in a case of mistaken identity after Mwepu Ilunga aimed a kick at a referee, only for Mulamba to take the rap.

He retired at 38 and was relatively well off but still unable to leave the country, and in 1994 he was awarded a medal by CAF to commemorate his historic goal haul 20 years prior. But in 1996 armed men invaded his house in Kinshasa, demanding money as well as the medal he had received from CAF. They shot him twice in the leg and his 11-year-old son, Jeff, was killed while seeking to intervene.

Mulamba fled to South Africa, but with no work he drowned his sorrows in beer and had to survive on the goodwill of motorists as a parking valet.

Eventually, he met and married Nzwaki Qeqe. Enjoying an upturn in fortunes, he declared: "I'm happy here. I've freedom – real freedom. There's a big difference in my life. Then I was on the street, now I'm living in a house with a wife."

However, despite insisting he would have nothing more to do with his home country, in 2014 he found his way back in circumstances that remain unclear.

It proved an ill-fated decision as his health quickly relapsed. With his heart and kidneys failing, and his mobility impaired as a legacy of those gunshot wounds two decades prior, he spent the rest of his days in a wheelchair calling on all and sundry to help him.

Upon his death, he was awarded a national medal of valour. Yet in a 2009 documentary, *Forgotten Gold*, he had lamented: "Compared to others who also achieved the same thing with their European countries, they are respected people, living well.

"Me? It's as if I have done wrong to my country."

Oluwashina Okeleji

Adrien Rabiot

France midfielder frozen out by PSG

Even a United Nations team of peace brokers would be hard pressed to find a solution to the Cold War stand-off that currently pits Paris Saint-Germain against their French international midfielder Adrien Rabiot.

The 23-year-old, whose PSG contract expires at the end of the season, has not made one first-team appearance since December, was declared persona non grata for announcing his intention to leave on a Bosman free in the summer.

The PSG powers-that-be are adamant that Rabiot and his agent – who just happens to be his mother, Veronique – acted in bad faith throughout the negotiations, that the pair were only interested in running down the clock.

"A few months ago, we had positive feedback from his entourage that he wanted to re-sign," declares PSG director of sport Antero Henrique.

"We'd also accepted all his sporting demands. Then, unfortunately, the talks ground to a halt. For the player, there are clear consequences. He will stay on the bench for an indeterminate period.

"It seems he and his representative misled us. The situation is disrespectful for both club and fans, especially as he's a player who came through the academy here. He's someone who always had total support from the club."

Rabiot, a tremendously elegant left-footer capable of operating anywhere in the middle of the park, is equally convinced that he has been badly treated in all this. He maintains that his permanent exclusion drives a coach and horses through French football's "professional charter'" and he has the backing of global players' union FIFPro and its Gallic equivalent, the UNFP.

"Is football about winning games or making profit?" went the FIFPro communique. "He has the right not to sign a new contract with his club."

Excluded...Rabiot has not played for PSG this year

> "To have him at 100 per cent he has to be convinced that it's the best for him and the team"
>
> **PSG's Thiago Motta on Rabiot**

A PSG first-teamer since 2012, Rabiot can be a difficult character to understand. Stubborn, and with more than a hint of the diva about him, he frequently grumbles to the media about being played out of position in a holding role, preferring a box-to-box brief. Last autumn he was benched by PSG coach Thomas Tuchel for arriving late for a team meeting and he infamously turned down a place on the French squad standby list for last year's World Cup.

According to Thiago Motta, a team-mate at PSG, anyone hoping to bring out the best in Rabiot has to be psychologically astute. "It all depends how you explain matters to him," the Italo-Brazilian told *So Foot* magazine. "He's not someone to whom you say 'do this or else'. You can't force him.

"He'll play but will only be at 60 per cent. To have him at 100 per cent he has to be convinced that it's the best for him and the team."

Hell will freeze over before Rabiot plays another game for PSG as the mutual animosity runs too deep, with a large proportion of the Parc des Princes fan base disliking his attitude. And he has also become a convenient scapegoat.

Henrique attacked Rabiot for going to a nightclub on the evening of the team's shock Champions League elimination at the hands of Manchester United. But was this not a classic case of deflection on the club's part? Was it not PSG's decision to freeze him out and leave him kicking his heels for months?

Wherever he ends up next season – be it the Premier League, La Liga or Serie A – he has a lot of career rebuilding to do and a reputation to mend.

The banished Parisian prince can afford no further messy controversy.

Nick Bidwell

Not happy...PSG fans display their anger

Corentin Martins

Ex-France international taking Mauritania to the African Nations Cup

Coach... leading the way

By the standards imposed on many of his contemporaries, Corentin Martins must consider himself somewhat fortunate to have been given time to forge development and realise success with underperforming Mauritania.

Four and a half years in the job – albeit with many hiccups along the way, including the threat of the sack – has allowed the former France midfielder to lead the *Mourabitounes* to a first-ever Africa Nations Cup finals appearance.

Mauritania, who had previously been counted among the continent's whipping boys, booked a place in June's 24-team finals well before the final round of qualifiers took place in March. It was a remarkable achievement for a country without any pedigree in the game, but a decision not to change the backroom staff at the end of every qualification cycle has made it possible for Martins to achieve success.

"Nothing was easy," says the 49-year-old. "We had little margins in every match and no real individual talent. We worked a lot on solidarity and team spirit, and we had four years to work together on this.

"It's a real feat because we are a small football nation, we do not have players playing in big leagues. Everyone knows we have done something exceptional. I'm not saying it's unexpected because the players deserved it, they made the effort on the field and they were rewarded.

"When I first arrived in Nouakchott, there were 11 first division teams and three pitches, all artificial. It was hard to even find a place to train.

"Now there are more fields. And, most importantly, while there was only one championship, there is now a second division and youth competitions."

Martins has also built up a squad of players, strengthening the side with players born in France to Mauritanian parents and also encouraging locals to leave and find clubs in Europe.

"There are now plenty of players in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, France, Georgia, Azerbaijan," he adds. "I keep track of them with visits and talking regularly on the phone. In my squad there are now 17 players based overseas."

Mauritania navigated their way through a qualifying group in which Angola and Burkina Faso were expected to reach the finals. But a 2-1 victory at home to Botswana in November – their fourth win in five group games – ensured progress.

"It was a game that gave me the most satisfaction in my sporting life," says Martins, who was capped 14 times by France and was a French league-and-cup double winner with Auxerre in 1996.

"Mauritania was really a minnow and this feat is major in the life of this country. The tears of the players, the leaders and the supporters after the match said as much. It was beautiful."

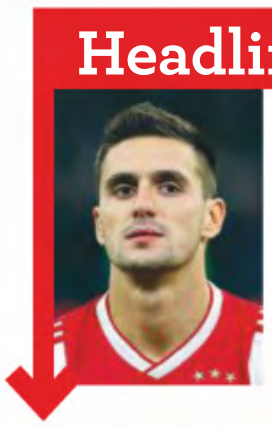
And a new contract now allows him to pursue the dream of a World Cup place.

"I am proud that the Mauritanians reached out to me and the football federation president has extended my contract twice now, ignoring the critics," he says. "I think it's rare for a coach in Africa to survive four years in the same team!"

Mark Gleeson

> "Everyone knows that we have done something exceptional"
> **Corentin Martins**

Proud...Mauritania



Dusan Tadic

Ajax number 10 thriving in the Champions League

Real finish...scoring Ajax's third goal in Madrid

French paper *L'Equipe* said Dusan Tadic's Champions League performance away to Real Madrid in the Santiago Bernabeu was "10, the perfect match", the Serbian international becoming only the ninth player in history to receive its top mark.

And what a well deserved 10 it was on a night when Ajax dethroned the reigning European champions with a stunning 4-1 victory, ending a reign that had lasted 1,012 days.

While most of the headlines about Ajax these days focus on the potential of Matthijs De Ligt, Andre Onana and Frenkie De Jong, it is Tadic who is the team's real architect. Playing as a false nine – or, as he calls it, a "fake striker" – the 30-year-old was simply irresistible in Spain. Providing two assists, one of which was after a brilliant pirouette, and scoring the decisive third goal, there was no doubt he was the man of the match.

"Nights like these are why I came to Ajax," Tadic said afterwards, expressing both his and the club's hunger for European success. "It's really special because Zinedine Zidane has always been my favourite player. I have always been a Real Madrid fan because Predrag Mijatovic played here."

But despite the offers that are likely to come from other clubs, he says: "I'm going nowhere, I will stay at Ajax."

That will certainly please director Marc Overmars, who changed the Dutch club's policy by signing Tadic from Southampton in the summer. Over the years the Amsterdam club has scouted the world's brightest talents in order to educate them before they left for Europe's giants. It had been a noble and successful policy, and one that was probably suitable to the Eredivisie given its size compared to the bigger leagues. But it is also one of the main reasons why Ajax have been lacking silverware, even domestically, since 2014.

> "I'm going nowhere, I will stay at Ajax"

And with Ajax probably being Europe's most prosperous club – no debts and circa €100million in the bank – the pressure was on Overmars. And his message was clear: let's ignore the next big talent in order to welcome more experienced players.

While Danny Blind, now a supervisory

Loyal...Tadic (above) makes Ajax tick and is loving his time with the Dutch side (left)

board member, asked his son Daley to return from Manchester United, scout Henk Veldmate had the task of convincing Tadic. Veldmate, who also discovered Luis Suarez in Uruguay, was the man responsible for Tadic's arrival at Groningen in 2010.

In the end, Ajax paid Southampton €11.5m and made the Backa Topola-born Serb the best paid player in Holland, on a salary said to be €2m.

There was an early dressing-room clash, with Tadic wanting the number 10 shirt. Ajax agreed, expecting Hakim Ziyech to leave, but with the Moroccan staying there was a problem – although it was quickly solved and Tadic was handed the shirt.

Winning that prestigious fight shows the importance of Tadic to Ajax. To his team-mates he is a role model. Ask any Ajax player where you can find him and they all have the same answer: in the gym. Just like he was at his former clubs Vojvodina Novi Sad, Groningen, Twente and Southampton.

"Nobody is more demanding for himself than Dusan," says Robbert Schilder, a former Ajax player who was Tadic's team-mate at Twente. "With that attitude he inspired the rest of the team. He was a winner."

He was always striving to improve, sometimes in unconventional ways. In Enschede, chairman Joop Munsterman once had to drag him off the pitch when he refused to leave despite not being fully fit. He also once played with a fever. And despite shaking all over his body he was one of the best players on the pitch.

Considering all the hard work he has put in in the past, his two sublime games against Real Madrid could be seen as his just reward. They also caused some wry smiles overseas. There are English pundits who claim the Premier League didn't see the real Tadic. But during his four seasons with Southampton he was in the top five of the league's assist providers three times. Not a bad record for a player from a team that never came close to being top six material.

Saint...at Southampton

By defeating Real Madrid, Ajax and Tadic received worldwide praise. However, arrogance is also part of the club's DNA and there is some talk in Amsterdam that winning the Champions League is now just a matter of time. With clubs like Barcelona, Manchester City and Juventus still in the competition, that might just be a bridge too far.

But who is to say that Ajax can't pull off this trick again? Or that Dusan Tadic can't grab the headlines again?

After all, it was for nights like these that he came to Ajax.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

The Mauro & Wanda Show

Words: Paddy Agnew

The career of Inter's Argentinian striker, supported by his agent wife, is at a crossroads

This is a story of our times, the story of an iconic footballer and his agent/wife in the age of Twitter and #MeToo. The impact of Wanda Nara, agent to her husband, Internazionale striker Mauro Icardi, tells the tale of a football community still reluctant in some quarters to renounce old-fashioned male chauvinism.

For a start, many Inter fans are worried that Ms Nara's aggressive marketing of her famous spouse could lead to his departure from the club. And then there are those who believe, basically, that the 32-year-old is interfering in men's business.

But to put this tale in context, you have to go back six years to the hot summer of 2013 when Icardi, Nara and another footballer, Maxi Lopez, all three of them Argentinian, became the ▸

Timeline

FEB 15, 2008
Signs for Barcelona a week before his 15th birthday and starts the 2008-09 season with their under-17 team.

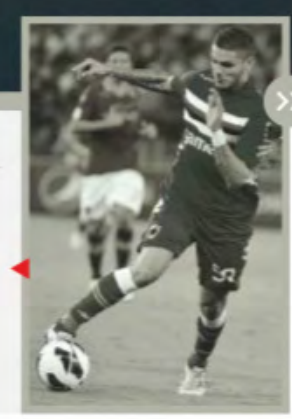
JAN 11, 2011
Joins Sampdoria on loan until the end of the season and plays for their Primavera team.

JUL 16, 2011
Sampdoria utilise their option and sign him on a three-year deal.

MAY 12, 2012
Makes his first-team debut, as a sub against Juve Stabia, and scores for Samp in a 2-1 win.

AUG 14, 2012
Makes his Argentina under-20 debut in a friendly against Germany.

SEP 26, 2012
Comes off the bench against Roma for his Serie A debut.



protagonists in a fateful love triangle.

At the time, Icardi and Lopez – who has played for River Plate, Barcelona and is currently with Vasco Da Gama in Brazil – were team-mates at Serie A side Sampdoria. Lopez was then married to Nara, with whom he had three children during their six-year marriage.

The two Argentinians in the Sampdoria dressing room became good friends, with Lopez, who is now 34, helping out his eight-year younger compatriot. They saw a lot of one another, with Icardi often hanging out at Lopez's house.

Sometime during the summer of 2013, Icardi and Nara started an affair and by November 2013 the whole Italo-Argentinian football world knew about it.

First, Nara announced, via Twitter, that her marriage to Lopez was over. A few days later, again via Twitter, Icardi declared his love for her with a tweet that read: "*Te Amo, nunca me sera sencillo decir lo Q siento*" (Wanda, I love you, it's not easy for me to describe what I feel for you).

During that summer, Icardi was bought by Inter, not so much to resolve dressing-room tensions but more because he was one of the best strikers in Italian football.

The move, however, meant that when

> "Icardi is a traitor...in my days, if a guy dared to even look at a team-mate's wife, we would have been queuing up in the dressing room to beat him up"
>
> **Diego Maradona**

Inter travelled to Genoa in April 2014 all eyes were on what sort of reception Icardi would receive. As the two teams exchanged pre-match handshakes, Lopez refused to acknowledge Icardi.

In the five years since then, Icardi's career has soared and soared. He has scored more than 100 goals for Inter, becoming the club's most iconic and inspirational player, and on whom they have put a €110million "buy out" price tag. At the same time, Lopez has moved from Sampdoria to Catania, Chievo, Torino, Udinese and finally, last summer, ending up in Brazil.

Intriguingly, Icardi's rise has not boosted his international career and since 2013 he has been largely shut out of the Argentina team. This could, of course, be down to the fierce competition

Presentation...with the family after receiving an award to honour his 100th Inter goal

NOV 12, 2012
Scores his first goal in Serie A as Sampdoria beat Genoa 3-1 in the *Derby della Lanterna*.

JAN 27, 2013
Scores four goals in a 6-0 thrashing of Pescara to lift Sampdoria clear of the Serie A relegation zone.

AUG 25, 2013
Makes his Inter debut as a second-half sub in a 2-0 win at home to Genoa.

SEP 14, 2013
Scores his first league goal for the *Nerazzurri*, in a 1-1 draw with Juventus.

OCT 15, 2013
Makes his international debut as a sub for Argentina in a 3-2 World Cup qualifying loss away to Uruguay.

APR 13, 2014
Gets two goals against former club Sampdoria as Inter win 4-0 away from home.

Frosty reception...Icardi is blanked during the pre-match handshakes by former team-mate Maxi Lopez on his return to Sampdoria with Inter in April 2014

for places in a squad which features Gonzalo Higuain, Paulo Dybala, Sergio Aguero and Lionel Messi, to name but the most obvious. But Argentinian commentators have also suggested that Icardi's "betrayal" of his team-mate might have something to do with his lack of call-ups. Back in 2013, Diego Maradona, not necessarily the first person to come to mind when one thinks of the moral high ground, felt the need to pronounce thus on the Icardi-Lopez-Nara triangle.

"As far as I am concerned, Icardi is a traitor," he told Argentinian station Radio Pop. "He goes to the guy's home, makes out that he is a great friend and then steals his wife. I call that betrayal.

"In my days, if a guy dared to even look at a team-mate's wife, we would have been queuing up in the dressing room to beat him up."

Maradona's words reflect the opinions of many and may also sum up those of Messi with regard to the current Argentinian squad.

Speaking on the eve of Russia 2018, former Argentina international Hernan Crespo became the umpteenth person to suggest that Icardi's exclusion has much to do with Messi. Icardi is not part of the "magic circle" that revolves around Messi, suggested Crespo. It is quite possible that Messi takes a dim view of Icardi's behaviour with Lopez, who was his team-mate for a year at Barca.

Meanwhile, the cynics can only conclude that Nara seems to have picked the more successful player. A kinder observer would point out that Icardi seems genuinely, hopelessly in love with his wife. The two got married in 2014 and since then they have had two more children together, making the Icardi household a lively place after she won custody of her three children by Lopez.

Nara has often said that Icardi is "a 40-year-old in a young man's body". By this she means that he has fully and gladly embraced his role as father to all five children. Their marriage seems to be happy and solid – and seemingly all the more so since she became her husband's agent in 2014.

Icardi and Nara have become Italy's answer to Victoria Adams and David Beckham, with Nara using her famous husband's celebrity not only to promote herself as a TV football pundit but also to start business initiatives such as the Wan Collection clothing line.

When her "promotional" activities limit themselves to Twitter comments and Instagram pics which catalogue the happy life and times of the Icardis, fans seem not to mind. When, however, as has happened this year, her TV appearances and tweets concern the negotiations about her husband's new contract or

Previously... Lopez and Nara

AUG 20, 2014

Scores on his European debut as Inter beat Stjarnan 3-0 in Iceland in the Europa League.

AUG 23, 2015

Captains Inter for the first time, in a 1-0 victory over Atalanta.

NOV 22, 2015

Makes his 100th Serie A appearance and scores in a 4-0 victory over Frosinone.

APR 9, 2016

Scores his 50th Serie A goal, on his 100th appearance for Inter, in a 1-0 win away to Frosinone.

Problems...Icardi has fallen out with Inter this year

indeed the performances of his team-mates, then reaction has been much more critical.

Contract negotiations have not proved straightforward, largely because Nara has not been shy about arguing her husband's cause. For instance, she told Spanish daily *AS* in January: "We are a long way from agreeing a new contract. We haven't yet received a satisfactory offer from Inter. Then, there are a lot of big clubs which would like to sign Mauro."

Currently on an after-tax €5.3m salary, Icardi has reportedly asked, via his wife, for as much as €9m. Inter, for their part, do not seem to appreciate the public nature of this negotiation. First, the club fined their captain €100,000 after he had returned late to Milan after the post-Christmas break; more importantly they took the captain's armband from him on the eve of a Europa League game against Rapid Vienna.

> "I would tell my wife that she cannot say things like that about my team-mates, otherwise I would put her out of the house"
>
> **Former Milan and Italy defender Alessandro Costacurta**

After that, Icardi did not play for the side, ostensibly because of a knee problem but more probably because of tensions both in the dressing room and with the club.

And that is where Nara enters again. On one of her TV appearances, in early February, she made seemingly critical noises about unnamed Inter players.

Asked about her husband's contract, she replied: "Look, if you give me a choice between a new contract and the purchase of a new player, someone who can lay on five good through balls, then maybe I would opt for the latter, a helping hand for Mauro".

Those words, inevitably, prompted a media storm.

Former England and Milan coach Fabio Capello said Icardi should distance himself from his wife's words, in a sense apologise to his team-mates. Ex Milan and Italy defender Alessandro Costacurta was more outspoken, saying: "I would tell my wife that she cannot say things like that about my team-mates, otherwise I would put her out of the house."

Costacurta's hardly politically correct view was shared by his former Italy team-mate Giancarlo Marocchi who said: "It's important that Wanda keep out of the Inter dressing room, metaphorically speaking of course."

So where will this story go? When the Icardis turned up to sit pitchside for Inter's 2-1 win over Sampdoria in February they were greeted with jeers and whistles just as soon as the giant screen focused on them during the match warm-up.

The fans' favourite idol is clearly losing traction. Inter-related websites are overwhelmed with less-than-favourable comments about both him and his wife. Even an open letter from Icardi to Inter, in early March, declaring his deep attachment to the club, does not seem to have moved everyone.

In the letter, Icardi pointed out how he had rejected fabulous offers from other clubs to stay with Inter.

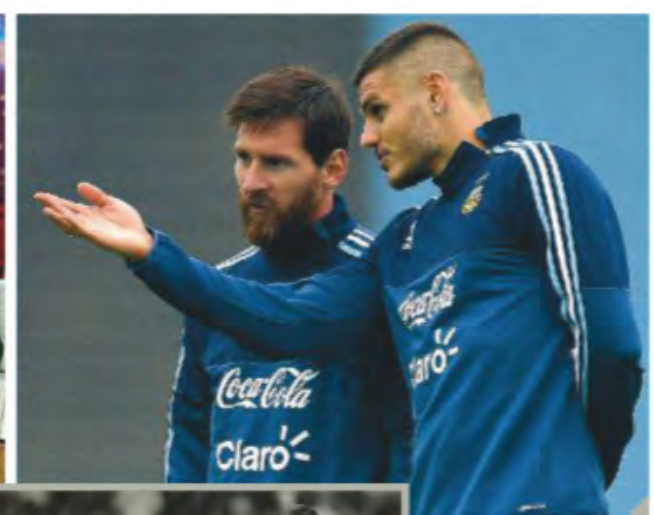
That admission only prompted fans to suggest that he was like a husband telling his wife that he loved her, even though he could have betrayed her with other more beautiful women.

Coming right on the eve of a Serie A game away to Cagliari, Icardi's letter may also have seemed a tad "polemical" to the club. Likewise, Inter hardly appreciated tweets from Nara, in which she claimed that coach Luciano Spalletti was pouring "petrol on the fire" with remarks which appeared to criticise her husband/client.

France Football magazine has decided that Icardi is merely a puppet in the hands of his wife who controls him "like an American soldier manoeuvres a drone". Wanda told *Gente* magazine back in Argentina that she is leading a "revolution in a male-chauvinist world".

Both affirmations could well be correct. Yet cynical football wisdom would suggest that, come next June, Inter and Icardi are destined to go their separate ways. WS

Showbiz... on Italian TV



Outcast...with Lionel Messi at a national-team training session

OCT 15, 2017
Gets all three goals as Inter beat city rivals Milan 3-2.

MAR 18, 2018
Scores four goals, including a 14-minute hat-trick, against his former club, Sampdoria, as Inter win 5-0 at Stadio Luigi Ferraris.

SEP 18, 2018
Plays his first game in the UEFA Champions League and scores in a 2-1 win against Tottenham Hotspur.

NOV 20, 2018
Scores his first senior international goal in a 2-0 win at home to Mexico.

FEB 14, 2019
Refuses to play in a Europa League game against Rapid Vienna after being stripped of the Inter captaincy the day before.

Mauro Icardi

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES

€0.4M
Barcelona to **Sampdoria** (2011)

€13M
Sampdoria to **Internazionale** (2013)

ARGENTINA

8
CAPS

1
GOAL

SERIE A TOP SCORER

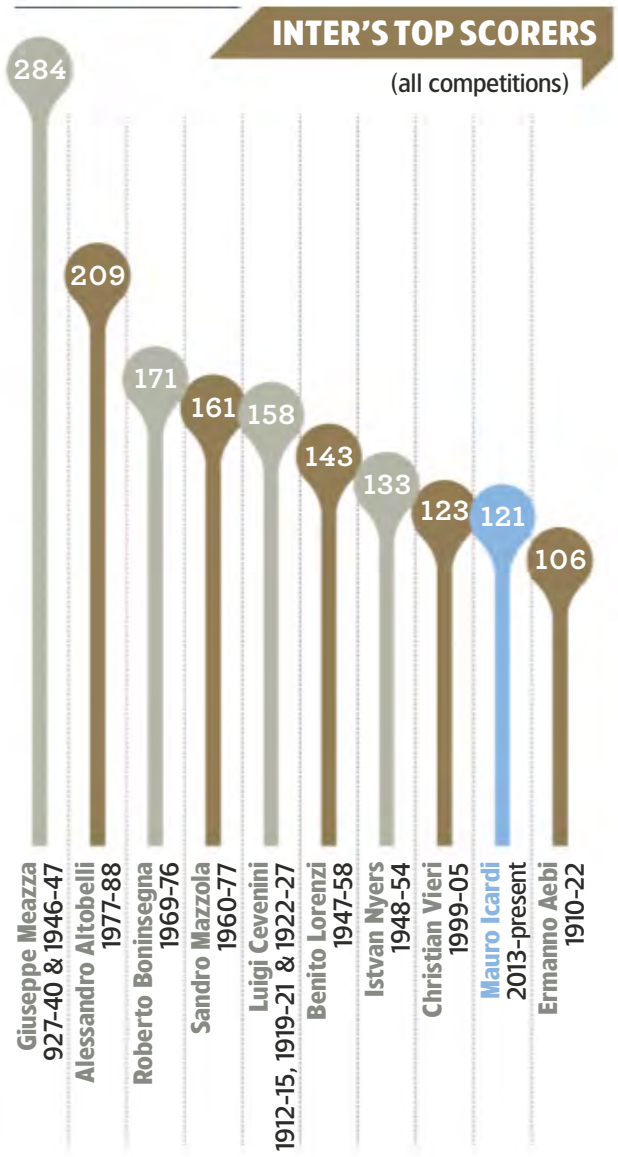
2013-14	Ciro Immobile (Torino)	22
2014–15	MAURO ICARDI (Inter)	22
	Luca Toni (Verona)	22
2015-16	Gonzalo Higuain (Napoli)	36
2016-17	Edin Dzeko (Roma)	29
2017-18	MAURO ICARDI (Inter)	29
	Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	29

YOUNGEST TO 100 GOALS IN SERIE A

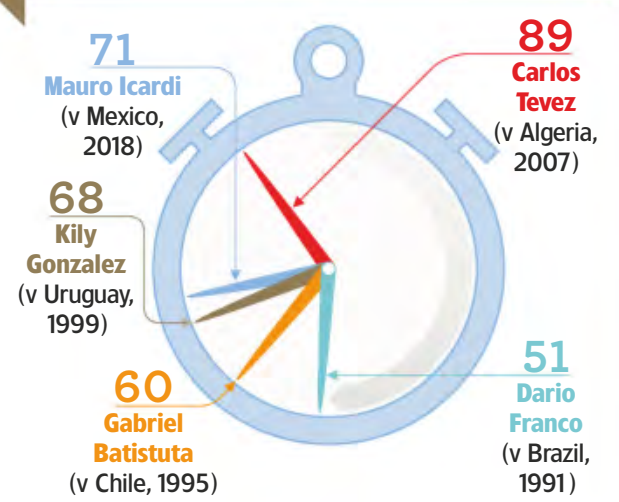
PLAYER	YEARS	DAYS
Giuseppe Meazza	23	32
Silvio Piola	23	68
Giampiero Boniperti	23	193
Felice Borel	23	307
Jose Altafini	24	239
MAURO ICARDI	25	27
Edinson Cavani	25	340
Omar Sivori	26	90
Guglielmo Gabetto	26	104
Alberto Gilardino	26	105

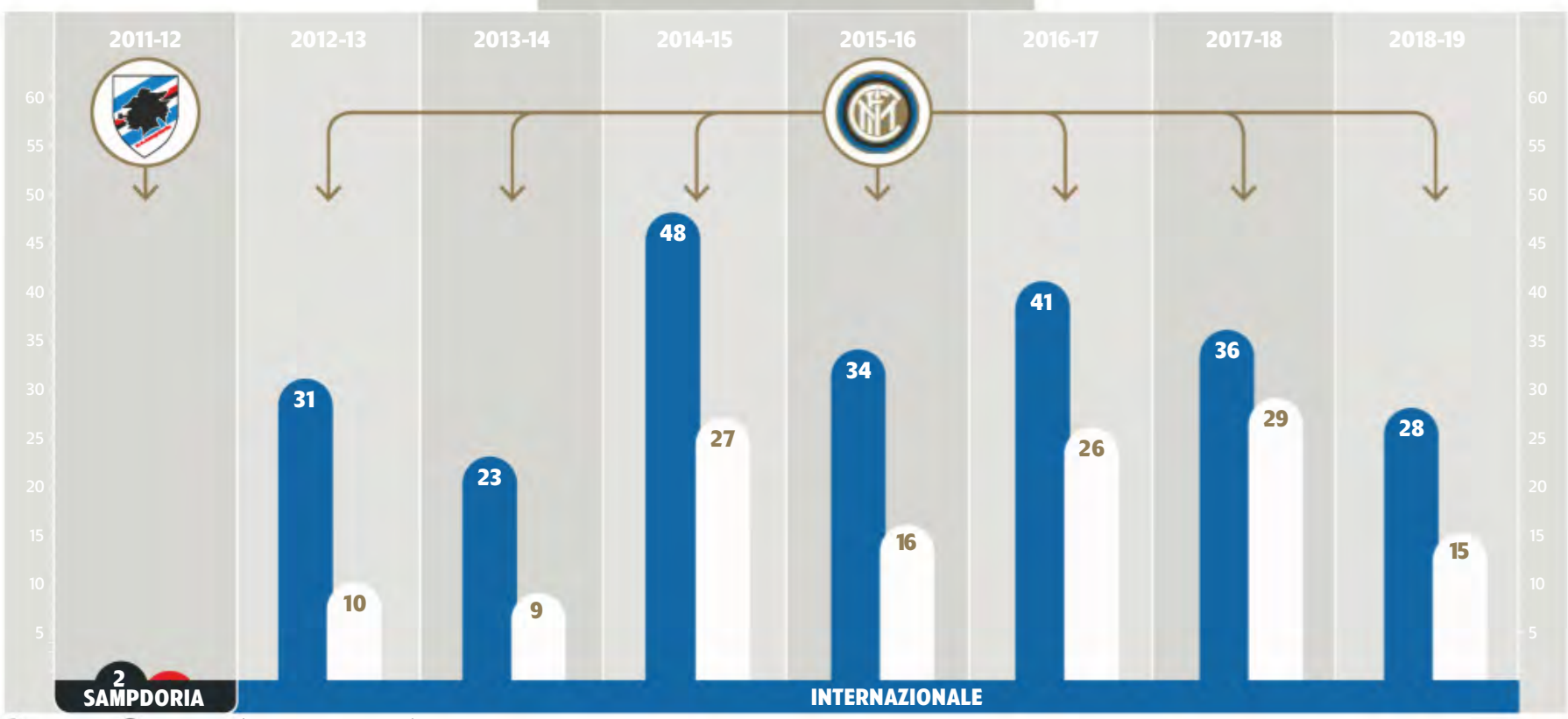
INTER'S TOP SCORERS

(all competitions)

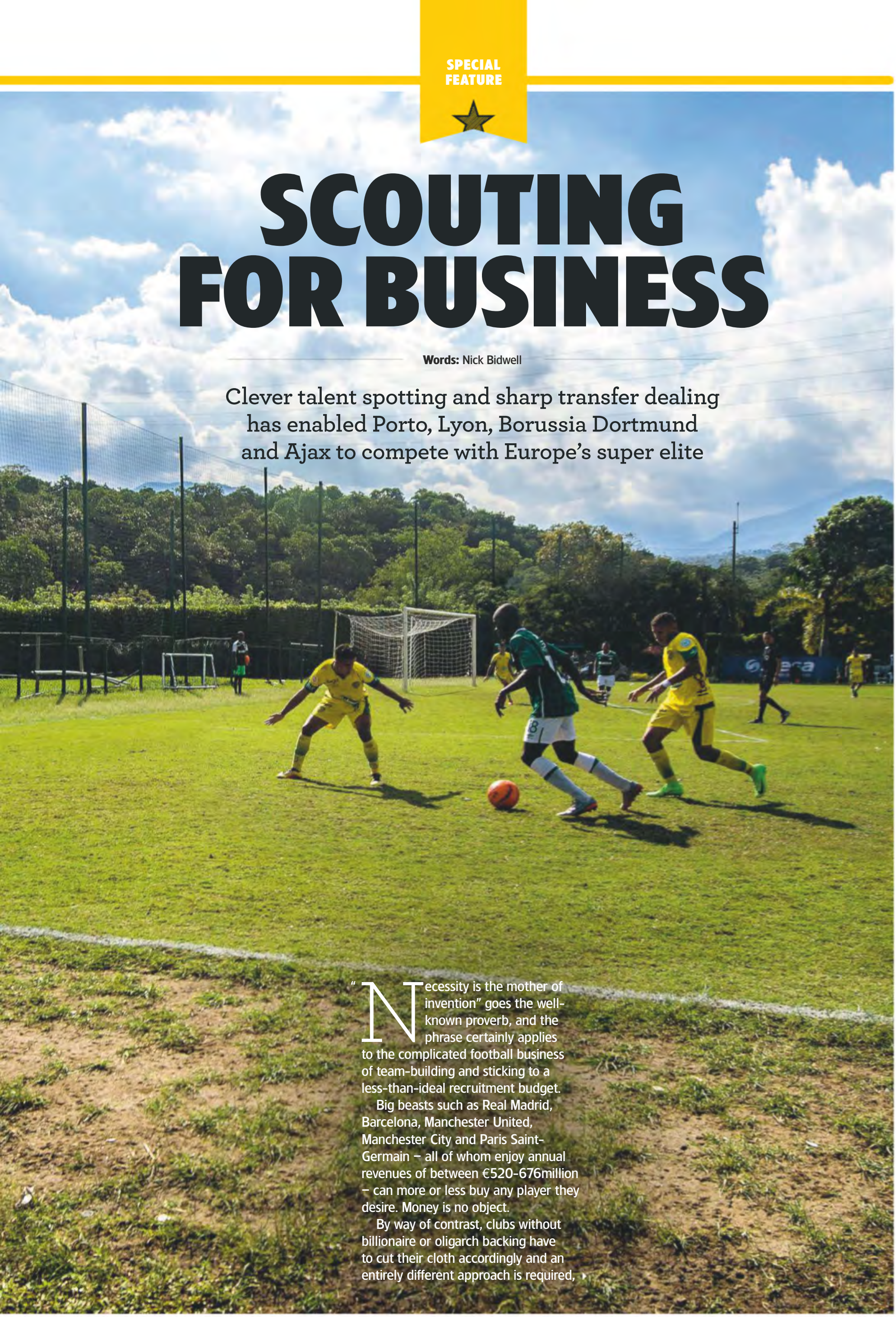


ARGENTINA'S QUICKEST GOALS (Secs)





GAMES GOALS *(up to & inc10.03.19)*



SCOUTING FOR BUSINESS

Words: Nick Bidwell

Clever talent spotting and sharp transfer dealing has enabled Porto, Lyon, Borussia Dortmund and Ajax to compete with Europe's super elite

"Necessity is the mother of invention" goes the well-known proverb, and the phrase certainly applies to the complicated football business of team-building and sticking to a less-than-ideal recruitment budget.

Big beasts such as Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain – all of whom enjoy annual revenues of between €520-676million – can more or less buy any player they desire. Money is no object.

By way of contrast, clubs without billionaire or oligarch backing have to cut their cloth accordingly and an entirely different approach is required,

one of creativity and resourcefulness. These clubs have to brainstorm their way forward.

Even teams who regularly play in the aristocratic playground that is the Champions League have to face an economic reality: they are not and probably never will be at the top of football's food chain.

While they are anything but also-rans, Lyon's operational budget of €289m is dwarfed by PSG's €500m. Borussia Dortmund, the number two force in the Bundesliga, are around €250m shy of the all-powerful Bayern Munich in the turnover stakes. Twice Champions League winners, Porto have to make do with a sixth of Manchester United and Real Madrid's income streams.

Plan...Porto's Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa

Faced with this most uneven of playing fields, the movers and shakers at Porto, for example, have long been advocates of what is best termed the "buy low, sell high" model, picking up talented foreign youngsters – mainly from South America – at minimal cost, smoothing off the rough edges and then selling them a few years down the line for a substantial profit. Since 2010, Porto have generated player sales of more than €548m, and over the same period have only once recorded a negative net-transfer spend.

> Clubs without billionaire or oligarch backing have to cut their cloth accordingly and an entirely different approach is required, one of creativity and resourcefulness

Not for nothing are Porto considered the deans of the transfer dividend. After buying Colombian striker Radamel Falcao from River Plate in 2005 for €5.43m, they sold him two years later to Atletico Madrid for €40m. His compatriot, midfielder James Rodriguez, who cost €7m from Argentinian side Banfield in 2010, would subsequently be traded to Monaco in a

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

"We don't buy stars, we develop them," says Dortmund youth department chief Lars Ricken, a long-serving midfielder for the club who scored in their 1997 Champions League Final victory against Juventus.

"It's not a clever-clever phrase. We've proved it with first-team players like [Mario] Gotze, [Christian] Pulisic and [Jacob] Bruun Larsen.

"With us there's an actual, tangible route from the youth team to the pros."

In a not-too distant past, Dortmund had quite different recruitment principles. In the mid-1990s they spent lavishly on a clutch of Serie-A based stars: stopper Jurgen Kohler, wing-back Stefan Reuter, libero Matthias Sammer, playmaker Andy Moller and striker Kalle Riedle. Then, in the first few years of the new millennium, they seemed only to have eyes for jaded journeymen. But all was to change in 2005 when they teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, undone by financial profligacy and a lack of Champions League action.

A more sustainable method of team-building had to be found and so the Ruhr version of "Moneyball" was born. Find a clutch of relatively undervalued youngsters, offer regular first-team opportunities and watch their marketability soar. Sell on for a fortune, rinse and repeat.

Over the last couple of years alone, Dortmund have banked close to €370m in player sales, with most of the treasure trove attributable to the off-loading of Ousmane Dembele, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Pulisic, who will link up with Chelsea next term. Dortmund's return on these three transactions is a mouth-watering €219.7m.

Head of ops... Markus Pilawa

Profitable... Ousmane Dembele

However, Dortmund's espousal of youthful talent is not merely a response to a latter-day economic meltdown. It also fits like a glove with the mentality of their supporters and the Ruhr region as a whole. Younger players generally bring verve, enthusiasm and daring to the table – and this is exactly the sort of football that the Westfalenstadion faithful demands.

The Dortmund scouting operation, headed by Markus Pilawa, is divided into three phases. In the 12-15 age group the club mainly prospect in the Ruhr. The net is widened for 16-19-year-olds to Germany and the EU. And for those over 19 the search goes worldwide.

Increasingly, Dortmund are looking to bring in dissatisfied tyros at big European clubs; the golden boys who know they are good but feel thwarted in their first-team ambitions.

Back in 2017, the Black-and-Yellows caused a stir when they lured boy-wonder winger Jadon Sancho away from Manchester City and last year they drew water from the same type of well, snapping up highly rated Barcelona attacking midfielder Sergio Gomez.

Ousmane Dembele
▲ bought €15m from Rennes
▼ sold €120m to Barcelona

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang
▲ bought €13m from Saint-Eitenne
▼ sold €63.75m to Arsenal

Christian Pulisic
● €0m
▼ sold €64m to Chelsea

Mario Gotze
● €0m
▼ sold €37m to Bayern Munich (re-signed for €22m)

Experience...Ajax staff oversee a training session

€45m deal. And the list of such sumptuous sell-ons is endless.

In the space of a couple of decades, Porto has become Europe's Ellis Island, both a favoured port of entry and platform for eventual stardom in the continent's major leagues.

The great Porto plan, instituted by president Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa sounds simple enough. But it's quite a balancing act to constantly sell one's best players, continually find adequate replacements and still remain competitive. The key to everything, of course, is an outstanding scouting network.

Porto have some 250 talent-spotting "eyes" in football hotspots around the world. They boast an extensive player database and a meticulous system of calibrating potential, and in the last few years they have set up "Dragon Force" academies in Valencia in Spain, the Colombian city of Bogota and Toronto, Canada. Never hesitating to check out a target, this is an organisation which has all bases covered.

Porto like to keep the details of their scouting wiles under wraps; for obvious reasons they do not want to run the risk of industrial espionage. However, some information has come to light.

According to French TV station Canal Plus, Porto have invested in a huge video observation suite, a facility with hundreds

LYON

The extensive use of young talent, either lured away from other French clubs or entirely spawned in-house, represents the absolute essence of today's Lyon.

Acutely aware that his club has no chance of competing with Paris Saint-Germain's immense spending power, OL president Jean-Michel Aulas sees an organic approach to staffing as the only possible solution.

"Our strategy is clear and precise," Aulas told the club's website last autumn. "In a world where the transfer market is worth more than €5billion a year, we aim to continue investing in the sporting development of both boys and girls.

"Our academy remains the number one in France and among the best in Europe. We bring on youngsters, they blossom and they become targets in the European market.

"You cannot prevent your best players wanting to one day play in Madrid, Barcelona or Manchester. Nabil Fekir almost joined Liverpool last summer, while Houssem Aouar, Tanguy Ndombele and Ferland Mendy attracted interest too.

"Our model is appreciated everywhere. We're praised for our infrastructure, our youth development programme and women's football. We are, perhaps, a little ahead of the rest.

"This is how we will stay competitive and one day will reach the European summit."

As far as Aulas is concerned, no player is ever untransferable. If his asking price is met, there is every chance of a deal. If not, he walks away. Whether buying or selling, he always strikes a hard bargain.

In the last 10 years, no fewer than 47 OL academy pupils have gone on to turn professional with the club – and given the money, effort and thought which has been pumped into the system, that's hardly surprising. Their youth department has a healthy annual budget of €6million, they opened a wonderful new academy three years ago and have over a hundred people working there. Nothing is left to chance, particularly in the areas of education, medical facilities and psychological back-up.

Only rarely do OL spend cash on a prime-time individual. According to Aulas, it's simply not feasible.

"Paying €23m for Memphis Depay was a one-off," he declared in a piece in Lyon daily *Le Progres* in October.

"The €20m we spent on Moussa Dembele is our limit. Going beyond that puts our existence at risk.

"I'm sure supporters would not want to see the club back where it was when I arrived: in Ligue 2 and in dire financial straits."

When they do buy, OL would much rather bring in a teenage prospect from elsewhere in France. The best recent examples? Former Valenciennes defensive midfielder Lucas Tousart, full-back Ferland Mendy (ex-Le Havre) and winger Maxwel Cornet (Metz).

Wanted...Nabil Fekir

Team-work...Jean-Michel Aulas (right) and scout Florian Maurice after signing Marcal

Alexander Lacazette
● €0m,
▼ sold €53m to Arsenal
Corentin Tolisso
● €0m,
▼ sold €41.5m to Bayern Munich
Karim Benzema
● €0m,
▼ sold €35m to Real Madrid
Michael Essien
▲ bought €8m from Bastia
▼ sold €30m to Chelsea
Mohamadou Diarra
▲ bought €4m from Vitesse
▼ sold €35m to Real Madrid
Samuel Umtiti
● €0m,
▼ sold €25m to Barcelona
Mariano Diaz
▲ bought €8m from Real Madrid
▼ sold €23m to Real Madrid

of screens and opportunities galore to monitor games all around the world.

All the best overseas talent-spotting programmes tend to have a particular geographical focus. Porto have an excellent track record in Brazil, Argentina and Colombia; Dutch champions PSV love their South American/Hispanic know-how; Bayer Leverkusen in Germany have their Brazilian connection; Ajax are a home-from-home for Scandinavians; while for colonial and linguistic reasons, French clubs never tire of dipping into the African reservoir.

Dortmund and other Bundesliga sides increasingly see England as the place to pan for gold, while equally attractive is Greater Paris, where French and overseas scouts are thick on the ground. Chelsea, for example, are highly active in this area.

Porto, Lyon and Dortmund did not simply wake up one day and declare themselves five-star diamond-polishers. They had to prove it to the outside world over a period of time, tempting would-be recruits with excellent training facilities, educational schemes, a tangible pathway to the first team and Champions League action. Factor in the extra mile they are prepared to go in their care of duty and you have the dream prospectus. Their USP well-established, they are very much at the front of the queue for talent.

Young stars...Lyon's youth team

Lyon, having been forced into something of a self-sufficiency regime by the construction of a new stadium and the Qatari state takeover at Paris Saint-Germain, in many ways represent the best of the "springboard club" thinking.

Their academy has been deemed France's best for six straight years and they have a wonderful record of churning

PORTO

Pioneers in turning cheap South and Central American youngsters into sell-on manna from heaven, FCP have the import-export business down to a tee.

Over the last 10 full seasons, they have maintained a remarkable balancing act. On the one hand, they have racked up net profits of €282million from transfer dealings. On the other, they have kept their competitive pre-eminence, with five Portuguese league titles, three domestic cups, the Europa League and six appearances in the knockout stage of the Champions League.

Porto's former director of sport, Antero Henrique – who currently is employed by Paris Saint-Germain – summed up the club's modus operandi in an interview with *France Football* magazine, explaining: "Porto's success is founded on three factors: recruitment, development and yield. Recruitment means scouting, development follows on from training and productivity is linked to the first-team performances of a player.

"Most players are young when they arrive at this club and they end up being in permanent training."

Here is a well-oiled system in every sense, though Porto have been fortunate too, especially with regard to Portuguese league regulations regarding foreign players. In contrast to most European leagues, there is no limit on non-EU players in the Primeira Liga. As long as Porto and others have eight individuals raised locally, the lights are green for go.

Porto currently have 13 Latin Americans – mainly from Brazil but also a smattering of Mexicans and Uruguayans – on their books.

Such an influx of talent from the Americas would not be possible elsewhere in Europe. France's Ligue 1, for example, only allows four non-EU players per squad. In Spain's Liga, only three are permitted in a match-day roster.

It also has to be remembered that not all of Porto's player trading returns went directly into the club coffers. For many years, they took full advantage of third-party ownership (TPO) arrangements, sharing the original outlay on recruits with various external investment groups. Following a big-money sale, the profits had to be divided.

With FIFA opting to ban TPOs in May 2015, the onus is now on the likes of Porto to find another way to express their marketplace savvy.

Ideas...Antero Henrique

Big dividend... James Rodriguez

James Rodriguez
▲ bought €7m from Banfield
▼ sold €45m to Monaco
Hulk
▲ bought €5m,
▼ sold €40m to Zenit
Radamel Falcao
▲ bought €5.43m from River Plate
▼ sold €40m to Atletico Madrid
Andre Silva
▲ bought €0m
▼ sold €38m to Milan
Jackson Martinez
▲ bought €8.8m from Jaguares
▼ sold €35m to Atletico Madrid
Danilo
▲ bought €13m from Santos
▼ sold €31.5m to Real Madrid
Ricardo Carvalho
● €0m
▼ sold €30m to Chelsea

OL graduate...Karim Benzema

out professionals, with eight of their current squad homegrown and no less than 35 ex-OL graduates in Europe's leading five championships.

"For us the goal is to start our scouting efforts in the Lyon area and our partner clubs [the majority are found in the Rhone-Alpes region, but there are also two in Paris and in such far-flung spots as Senegal, South Korea and Libya]," says academy director Jean-Francois Vulliez. "The core of our young teams is Lyonnais plus others from different horizons. We scout kids from the age of nine or 10 to 17. Ours is a mixed academy. We have 250 boys from under-eights to under-20s and around 150 in the girls section."

> "The core of our young teams is Lyonnais plus others from different horizons. We scout kids from the age of nine or 10 to 17"
>
> **Lyon academy director Jean-Francois Vulliez**

In France's capital of gastronomy, the proof of the OL pudding is in the eating, with such class-act academy graduates such as Karim Benzema, Alexandre Lacazette, Samuel Umtiti, Anthony Martial, Corentin Tolisso and present-day stars Nabil Fekir and Houssem Aouar.

A dish to put before a king. WS

AJAX

An Ajax official once joked to *World Soccer*: "When we sell a player we just go along to the pond and hook out another."

That was more than two decades ago, when a team of mostly homegrown youngsters that had won the 1995 European Cup was being broken up.

The Ajax official was putting a brave face on a recruitment crisis caused by the Bosman ruling. Patrick Kluivert, Clarence Seedorf, Edgar Davids, Frank and Ronald De Boer, Edwin Van der Sar and Marc Overmars all left Amsterdam, many on free transfers or reduced fees.

In addition to their famed academy, Ajax had always recruited overseas players, with the 1995 European Cup-winning side also containing Finnish playmaker Jari Litmanen and Nigerians Nwankwo Kanu and Finidi George.

But Bosman revolutionised the European transfer market and left Ajax struggling to compete.

Ceding domestic dominance to PSV, Ajax were forced to play a more pragmatic style, prompting Johan Cruyff to lament in his *De Telegraaf* column that "this is not Ajax any more" and call for drastic change.

The subsequent "Velvet Revolution" saw Ajax go back to basics, placing emphasis once again on developing youth and handing control to former players. The likes of Wim Jonk and Dennis Bergkamp returned in key managerial positions, with Marc Overmars appointed as technical director.

The club re-doubled its efforts to recruit Holland's best youngsters and the results have been savoured this season, with Frenkie De Jong, Matthijs De Ligt and Donny Van de Beek all playing key roles in the Champions League.

A more recent development has been a loosening of the purse strings with the club spending big money on Dusan Tadic (€11.4m), Daley Blind (€16m), David Neres (€11.4m) and Hakim Ziyech (€11m).

Director... Marc Overmars

Crucial to Ajax's recent renaissance has been the recognition that their best young players will be sold to fund the next cycle of success. Last summer, they were unable to persuade Justin Kluivert to stay and he was sold to Roma, but De Jong and De Ligt were tempted to spend another season in Amsterdam.

In January, defender Lisandro Magallan arrived for €9m from Boca Juniors as a likely replacement for De Ligt, who could follow De Jong, who has agreed a €75m deal to join Barcelona this summer.

"I will be proud," says coach Erik Ten Hag. "The scouts who found them will be proud. Marc Overmars will be proud. Everyone will be. If they transfer to a big club you are happy for them."

Next generation...Frenkie De Jong (left) and Matthijs De Ligt have both impressed in this season's Champions League

Frenkie De Jong
● €0m
▼ sold €75m to Barcelona (summer 2019)
Davinson Sanchez
▲ bought €5m from Atletico Nacional
▼ sold €45m to Tottenham Hotspur
Arkadiusz Milik
▲ bought €3m from Bayer Leverkusen
▼ sold €35m to Napoli
Klaas-Jan Huntelaar
▲ bought €10m from Heerenveen
▼ sold €27m to Real Madrid
Davy Klaassen
● €0m
▼ sold €27m to Everton
Wesley Sneijder
● €0m
▼ sold €27m to Real Madrid
Luis Suarez
▲ bought €7.5m from Gronignen
▼ sold €25m to Liverpool

VICTOR WANYAMA

"It used to make me angry. But at least I tell the truth"

Kenya's leading player on his team's fight to qualify for their first African Nations Cup since 2004

You're a little like George Weah in his playing days with Liberia: the only recognised international star in an otherwise underperforming national team that almost demands that you carry them on your shoulders. How do you deal with that?
For me, it's a bit difficult. It's not easy being the only one playing in a big league with a major team and then having to perform for my country. People look up to you and there is an expectation, which is tough. Individually it is nice to have all the recognition, but it is also tough because the country needs more players if it is to earn qualification for big tournaments like the Nations Cup or the World Cup. There are some positives to my situation but also negatives.

Do you feel obligated to almost drag the team along?
We've had a lot going on with our football in Kenya, all the wrangles in the federation, but now it seems to have settled down and it's the right time to start fighting to get the team up to a better standard. Qualifying for the Nations Cup means we can now plan for the future. It has to start with me. I know my mentality is really good and I always want to win everything. Going to each game, I like to win. We started badly but we managed to qualify. We fought together. I feel I pulled the team together and we achieve a goal.

It helped in your situation that the Nations Cup was expanded to 24 teams, which meant two would qualify from each group...
It was good but we didn't see it as a route to the finals because we also had our belief at the beginning when there was only the group winner guaranteed to qualify. For me, I don't think there are any big teams left really in African football and you saw in the qualifiers how countries struggled. You saw how difficult it was for Nigeria at the beginning of the qualifiers and they are a big team. It shows there are no big teams anymore. With the right mindset and fighting spirit, keeping the team together, we can achieve.

There are not many Kenyans playing in Europe so most of the team is home-based. Do you think there is enough quality in the Kenyan league?
We have a lot of quality in Kenya; a lot of quality in Kenyan football. There are small things that we lack. We need some more belief and to show some more passion and more fighting spirit. But we've worked hard on that and if we can keep that going we have the potential to go far.

Being based in London with Tottenham Hotspur, and focusing on your club career and dealing more recently with injuries, how does playing for the national team fit in, given all the travel and disruption?
It's not easy but it's also nice to get back to Kenya, knowing that I'm going to play for the national team and represent my country. That's the best thing, I really enjoy that. But it's not easy to travel around, play the games in distant places and then immediately you have to go straight back to your club. It's a bit hard but I do enjoy playing for my country.

Kenya is one of Africa's stronger economies, a powerhouse at the Olympics, and yet underachievers in football. Why?
I would say it has been because of the wrangles between the administrators in the past, the lack of focus on what is important and how the [national] team should be run. Arrangements were also poorly done, making it hard to play for the national team. It affected the players. But with the resources and facilities we have now, the better conditions, it is helping the players to be better prepared. It used to make me angry and when I spoke out about it [the officials] got angry with me. But at least I tell them the truth. I think now the federation that has come in listens more and has taken onboard the things they need to change and are trying to do it right – which is good.

What will it mean to you to play in the Nations Cup finals in Egypt?
It has always been a dream for me to take Kenya to the Afcon. It will be a very big experience for me because that's what I've been fighting for, for many years and I hope to give something now to our fans.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

Photo: Daniel Irungu/EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock

FEDERATION

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

WORDS: Tim Vickery

SOUTH AMERICAN U20 STARS

Ecuador were winners of the 2019 South American Under-20 Championship and they – along with Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia – will represent the continent this summer at the Under-20 World Cup in Poland.

MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES

Bolivia's 17-year-old centre-back **Jairo QUINTERO** (Valencia, Spa) is quick, two-footed and adept at bringing the ball out, while striker **Sebastian MELGAR** (Boca Juniors, Arg) also impressed.

Brazil's **PHELIPE Megiolaro** (Gremio) was the keeper of the tournament in a very disappointing team. **MARCOS ANTONIO** (Estoril, Por) was a constant, busy presence in midfield, while **Igor GOMES** (Sao Paulo) has talent as an attacking midfielder.

Argentina's **Santiago SOSA** (River Plate) is a central midfielder who was forced to play at centre-back and has a fine eye for a pass. **Anibal MORENO** (Newell's Old Boys) was the engine of the midfield, while **Pedro DE LA VEGA** (Lanus) is a fine attacking midfielder.

With his electric pace, **Ivan ANGULO** (Envigado) was Colombia's most potent attacking weapon and he now joins Palmeiras in Brazil.

Ecuador goalkeeper **Wellington RAMIREZ** (Independiente del Valle) grew in confidence during the competition, while Paraguay's **Marcelo NAMANDU** (Cerro Porteno) had a potent shot.

Uruguay's **Nico SCHIAPPACASSE** (Parma, Ita) remains a dangerous force up front, and Venezuela's best attacking moments usually featured **Samuel SOSA** (Talleres, Arg), who is a veteran of the 2017 Under-20 World Cup runners-up.

Diego PALACIOS

Age 19 (12.07.99), defender, Willem II (Hol, on loan from SD Aucas) & Ecuador

Left-back who has a senior cap and was dangerous in attack. His ability to cover the centre-backs was important defensively, but he needs to calm down as he was a frequent candidate to pick up yellow cards.

Carlos CUESTA

Age 19 (09.03.99), defender, Atletico Nacional & Colombia

Accomplished centre-back and captain of a team that conceded just three goals in nine games. Displayed good reading of the game and timing in the tackle. Perhaps interpreted his role too conservatively, but got forward to score against Chile.

Julian ALVAREZ

Age 19 (31.01.00), midfielder, River Plate & Argentina
A thoroughbred who had a frustrating time, often because he tended to be used out wide when a central role may suit him better. An attacking midfielder who could also feature as a striker, he caught the eye with his ability and vision.

Vision...Julian Alvarez (left) caught the eye

Jordan REZABALA

Age 19 (29.02.00), midfielder, Independiente del Valle & Ecuador
Left-footed playmaker who was full of ebullient skill and clever changes of rhythm. An individual talent who played for the team, working hard and finding the right pass, either in quick one-twos or with longer balls.

Bruno MENDEZ

Age 19 (10.09.99), defender, Wanderers & Uruguay
Centre-back who made his senior international debut against Brazil in November. Combative and constructive captain whose occasional lapses were more than outweighed by the effectiveness of his contribution. Set to join Corinthians in Brazil.

Leandro CAMPANA

Age 18 (24.07.00), striker, Barcelona & Ecuador
The tournament's top scorer with six goals and referred to by his coach, Jorge Celico, as the "angel of the goal". He led the line well but a lack of pace could be a problem. Comes from an illustrious family in both Ecuadorian sports and politics.

Jose CIFUENTES

Age 19 (12.03.99), midfielder, America de Quito & Ecuador
The outstanding central midfielder of the tournament, he was strong, mobile and commanding. Strikes the ball well and has the capacity to see an interesting pass. He supplied the platform for his team's fluid attacking game.

Christian MAKOUN

Age 18 (05.03.00), midfielder, Juventus (Ita) & Venezuela
Son of a former player from Cameroon, he is a tough centre-back with impressive recovery speed. His leadership as captain could be questioned, though, as he failed to organise those around him in the team's disastrous last week of the campaign.

6 of the best

Golden oldies

Nick Bidwell on the players who are thriving in the twilight of their careers

1 Lisandro LOPEZ

RACING

It may be more than half a decade since this cunning Argentinian striker last played his club football in Europe – where he shone for eight seasons with Porto and Lyon – but there is no way anyone could consider the 36-year-old "Licha" to be a spent force.

Racing's captain and standard-bearer has simply been in quite irresistible goalscoring form for the Avellaneda outfit this season and he remains extremely confident that his side will end the campaign in top spot.

"We're obliged to win the title, he explains. "We don't have an alternative. We'll fight to the death to be champions."

Having returned to Racing in December 2015, arriving on a free from Brazilian side Internacional, he has recently extended his contract to the summer of 2020.

2 Claudio PIZARRO

WERDER BREMEN

At the age of 40 years and 136 days, the Peruvian striker recently became the oldest-ever Bundesliga marksman, and apart from an apprenticeship in his homeland with Alianza Lima and a short stint with Chelsea, he has spent the vast bulk of his professional life in Germany, enjoying four separate stints in Bremen, two with Bayern Munich and a loan spell at Cologne last season.

With almost 200 goals in the German top flight he has a pedigree of sustained excellence. He is fifth in the all-time scoring rankings, is the most prolific foreign finisher in the league's history and is the only Bundesliga player to have scored in 21 consecutive calendar years.

Powerful in the air and clever in his off-the-ball movement, he rarely starts these days but he has lost none of his enthusiasm for the game and once said: "I could have had an even better career."

Guess he'll just have to make do with the six Bundesliga titles, six DFB cups and a Champions League winners medal...

3 CHARLES
EIBAR

A mere date of birth has next-to-no significance for the Basque-based South American spearhead. The 34-year-old has goals in his blood and, if anything, seems to be gaining in effectiveness as time ticks on.

Among La Liga's top scorers this season, he is far from an overnight sensation. A native of the Brazilian city of Belem, he was a winger in his early days, and for much of his 15 years in Spain the second tier was his habitat. In fact, he had to wait until he was 29 to crack the top flight, the door being opened by a switch from Almeria to Celta Vigo.

Oddly, he is not an automatic first choice for Eibar this term, making as many substitute cameos as starts. And given that he only has a few months left on his current contract he may well be tempted to look elsewhere for greater appreciation.

But with a goal every 95 minutes, only Lionel Messi has better stats this term.

4 Fabio QUAGLIARELLA
SAMPDORIA

A veteran of more than 570 competitive games with sides such as Juventus, Torino, Sampdoria, Napoli and Udinese, the 36-year-old front man has no intention of walking away from the spotlight any time soon.

As sharp as he ever was, he scored in 11 consecutive Serie A games earlier this season to equal a record set by Fiorentina's Gabriel Batistuta in 1994.

He is a centre-forward who can hit the target every which way and even scored with a back-heel volley against Napoli in September.

Capped 26 times, a growing number of pundits believe he should be recalled to the Italian national team he last represented back in 2010.

5 Olivier DESCHACHT
LOKEREN

After 21 years and 603 first-team games with Anderlecht – where he won eight national titles – the former Belgium international defender opted to go back to the future last summer, signing on a free for Lokeren, the club whose youth team he used to play for.

Many saw it as a retrograde step, and with Lokeren struggling to stay afloat in the Belgian elite this season the 38-year-old must have had more than the odd tinge of regret.

However, he certainly had a ball when Lokeren visited Anderlecht in November. Handed a gift before kick-off, he received a standing ovation from the locals and then headed in his side's equaliser – which led to the home fans immediately chanting his name.

"I'll never forget this day and that's down to the supporters," declared a tearful Deschacht on the final whistle.

"My departure from Anderlecht did hurt. I wanted to stay for another year and then maybe work for the club.

"The owner decided otherwise."

6 Frode KIPPE
LILLESTROM

Over two spells and 19 seasons, the giant centre-back has given sterling service to Lillestrom since making his debut at the age of 19 and leading the side to Norwegian Cup triumphs in 2007 and 2017.

Now 41, he is the sort of gladiator coaches dream of: robust, totally committed, a fine captain and a good source of headed goals from set-pieces. With more than 460 appearances for the club he needs two more years to become the oldest-ever footballer in Noway's top flight.

An international on eight occasions, he was on Liverpool's books as a youngster but only had of a couple of first-team games. He also had a loan spell at Stoke City, who were then in the third English tier, prior to heading home in 2002.

Glenn Moore

Big guns lose key players

World Cup absences could level the playing field in new NWSL season

For the past three seasons, two teams have dominated the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). Between them, North Carolina Courage and Portland Thorns have won 87 and lost 31 of 149 matches, collecting both the regular-season shields and post-season play-off championships each year. Englishman Paul Riley's Courage – known as Western New York Flash before relocating to Cary – have had the upper hand, winning two of each, but compatriot Mark Parsons' Thorns have pushed them close.

This season, however, hope is on the horizon for the other NWSL teams – and it arrives in the shape of the Women's World Cup in France.

The finals fall mid-season, and while there will be a 12-day break from June 3-14, the World Cup itself runs from June 7 to July 7. Add the demands of pre-tournament preparation and post-competition recovery and it is clear that many players, especially those representing countries that go deep into the competition, will miss a large chunk of the domestic campaign.

There were five Courage players in the USA squad for the recent SheBelieves Cup – the most of any club – plus a sixth in the preliminary party. Riley could also lose up to four players to other countries, including skipper Abby Erceg, who is now back in the fold for New Zealand, and Brazil's Debinha.

Parsons is likely to be without nine players: four from the US, three Aussies, Canada's talismanic Christine Sinclair and Brazil's Andressinha.

That is a lot of players to be without and while others will also be affected – notably Chicago Red Stars and Utah Royals – the main effect should be to level the playing field for a third of the 24-match regular-season schedule.

Parsons admits "losing this number of players, and their quality, will be a big challenge" but says their likely replacements had gained valuable experience during Thorns' injury-hit 2018 season and he was confident they "have the ability to step in and pick up points".

As problematic for Thorns could be having to play on the road until June while building work at Providence Park is completed. However, that may not prove such a handicap as Parsons noted that playing in front of the league's biggest crowds means Thorns "often see the best of opponents who are excited and motivated" by the experience.

With three matches against the big two during the World Cup period, Reign FC could be the main beneficiaries.

Their 35-mile move south from Seattle to Tacoma, and dropping of the Seattle name, is the most notable change of the NWSL's seventh season. That, in itself, is significant, given that a year ago NWSL kicked off without two founding franchises; Boston Breakers having folded and Kansas City Royals having effectively become Utah Royals.

Equally telling is that the move is motivated by league demands for higher standards. Memorial Park, Reign's home since 2014, was very dated, faced restrictions on hospitality and had declining attendances. Unable to find a suitable alternative in Seattle, the franchise moved to the remodelled Cheney Stadium with a long-term plan to move into a new, adjacent 5,000-seat soccer-specific stadium in 2021.

> While there will be a 12-day break from June 3-14, the World Cup itself runs from June 7 to July 7

Call-ups...Utah Royals (in white) and Chicago Red Stars

Top two... North Carolina Courage (left) and Portland Thorns

Reign made the play-offs last year, as did Chicago, and they will be competitive again, but Orlando Pride and Utah will also expect to be in contention. Both are well supported, backed by MLS clubs and feature some marquee names: Alex Morgan and Marta at Pride; Becky Sauerbrunn and new signing Veronica Bouqete at Utah.

Pride are one of three clubs with new coaches, all of whom have questions to answer. However, while those facing Marc Skinner at Orlando and James Clarkson at Houston Dash are conventional – Skinner has not worked in the US, Clarkson has never coached women – Washington Spirit's Richie Burke faced shock accusations of bullying by the parents of a former youth player.

Burke was alleged to have used homophobic and abusive language towards a 15-year-old boy while coaching junior side FC Virginia. The issue was made public by the family because they are fans of Spirit and unhappy at his appointment. Spirit said they consulted

the club and other parents and appear to consider the matter closed. Burke has considerable experience in youth football, including coaching the daughter of Spirit's majority owner Steve Baldwin.

Also under the microscope are Sky Blue, who faced severe criticism last season for providing inadequate facilities for players, both in terms of accommodation, transport and training. Promised upgrades came too late for draft picks Hailie Mace and Julia Ashley, who chose to play abroad rather than for the New Jersey club, while many fans are waiting to see what is actually delivered. Much work is also required on the pitch, given the only victory of 2018 was in the final week.

Like other women's leagues, the NWSL will hope for a Women's World Cup bounce, especially if the US team live up to their billing of favourites.

Attendances are growing, with the 6,000-plus average in 2018 more than 40 per cent up on the inaugural 2013 campaign. That aids the chances of a 2020 expansion team returning the league to 10 clubs. A club in Los Angeles, possibly with the involvement of Barcelona, remains favourite. WS

New signing...Marta

Round-up

USA PLAYERS SUE FEDERATION
American players marked International Women's Day by filing a class-action lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation alleging gender discrimination and calling for equal pay. The USA women's team, uniquely, is not only more successful than the national men's team but also generates similar revenues.

MILICIC TO LEAD MATILDAS
Former Socceroo Ante Milicic will take Australia to this summer's World Cup on an interim appointment following the shock sacking of Alen Stajcic. Milicic, who has been working for the Australian federation on the men's side since 2014, made a good start as the Matildas hosted and won the Cup of Nations, ahead of South Korea, New Zealand and Argentina.

VAR FOR WORLD CUP
FIFA is planning to use video assistant referees at the World Cup after trials at a boys' tournament in Qatar using female officials this summer. VAR has not previously been used in the women's game and is likely to be adjudicated by men, though the on-pitch officials will be female.

ENGLAND, NORWAY AND NORTH KOREA WIN
England lifted the prestigious SheBelieves Cup – their first success in four attempts – by defeating Japan and Brazil, and drawing with hosts USA.

The Algarve Cup was won by Norway, still without Ada Hegerberg, who beat Poland 3-0 in the Final.

In the Cyprus Cup, North Korea – who were banned from this year's World Cup – beat Italy on penalties after a 3-3 draw during which they were reduced to nine players.

Good start... Martina Voss-Tecklenburg

FAST START FOR VOSS-TECKLENBURG
Germany enjoyed a winning start under new coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, with an impressive 1-0 victory over France in Laval. France had won their previous eight matches including inflicting the first loss for 18 months on the United States in January.

KOREAS CONSIDER JOINT BID FOR 2023
North and South Korea revealed plans to make a joint bid to host the 2023 Women's World Cup. Other candidates are Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa.

SYDNEY ON TOP DOWN UNDER
Sydney won Australia's W-League Grand Final, beating Perth Glory 4-2 with two goals from American Savannah McCaskill. In the semi-finals, Perth had defeated regular-season winners Melbourne Victory by the same score, with Sam Kerr scoring a hat-trick.

Champions...Sydney

Final...England's Beth Mead scores against Japan

April 1997

Samp set to lose Swedish coach Sven

Sampdoria featured on the front cover of this issue of *World Soccer*, and inside Gavin Hamilton profiled the Italian side who would eventually finish sixth in Serie A despite constantly losing their best players and coach Sven Goran Eriksson announcing mid-season that he too would be leaving.

"Last summer, Samp again sold off the family silver, rasing £14million from the sale of Enrico Chiesa (to Parma) and Dutchman Clarence Seedorf (Real Madrid)," wrote Hamilton, who added: "Off the pitch, the strategy has worked wonders for the club's bank balance. On the pitch, however, Eriksson has been forced to blood young talent from home and abroad, with indifferent results."

In December, Eriksson had announced he would quit Italy at the end of the season for Blackburn Rovers. But a sudden upturn in Samp's results saw the Swede become very much in demand.

"All of a sudden, Lazio were interested in his services," explained Hamilton. "All of a sudden, Lancashire seemed a long way away.

"Eriksson apologised to Blackburn for leading them up the garden path. There was talk of disagreements with Blackburn owner Jack Walker over transfers and of Eriksson wanting to stay in Italy for the sake of his family.

"The reality was simple: Eriksson received a better offer from Lazio."

With Eriksson's Sampdoria side hamstrung by the need to be forever cashing in on their best players, Hamilton noted that "not only do they lack strength in depth, they are far too dependent on one player".

The player in question was striker Roberto Mancini, of whom Eriksson said: "I have to admit the older he gets, the better he becomes."

Hamilton warned that "this is likely to be Mancini's last season in Genoa, before a lucrative summer transfer" and "losing Mancini, not to mention Eriksson, will be a huge blow".

Tellingly, when Eriksson did eventually join Lazio that summer, he wasted no time in returning to his old club and enticing Mancini to join him. WS

Wanted...Sven Goran Eriksson (far left)

Vintage... Roberto Mancini

> **"I have to admit the older he gets, the better he becomes"**
>
> Sven Goran Eriksson on Roberto Mancini

Also in this issue...

p12 In Barranquilla to interview Colombia's Faustino Asprilla, Jim Foulerton was informed by a taxi driver that the striker "is not just a great player, he has magic".

p25 "Never mind Eric Cantona. Forget about David Ginola," wrote Keir Radnedge. "They may grab the headlines in England, but when it comes to all-round international achievements the Juventus midfield anchor is 'The Man'." And Juve coach Marcello Lippi said: "We have plenty of men who can score goals...but the outstanding creative players are very few and far between. We're lucky: we have Deschamps."

p33 In his World Cup 98 briefing, Nick Bidwell reported on a side returning from international isolation. "For two-and-a-half years they had no fixtures at all and then existed only on friendlies," he explained. "But such is the skill and desire within the Yugoslav camp that they have readjusted remarkably well."

p42 In Albania, Gezim Nushi revealed how "league leaders Flamurtari may boycott matches for the remainder of the season as a gesture of support to their supporters". The club said they would not play again until those who had lost money in a recent financial scandal following the "collapse of pyramid saving schemes" were repaid.

p44 Eric Weil explained how, despite the sale of midfielder Ariel Ortega to Valencia for an Argentinian club record fee of £7million, River Plate were the only team with maximum points in the Clausura, while rivals Boca Juniors "under new coach Hector Veira have again made a poor start".

10 years ago

Barry Ferguson and Allan McGregor are banned for life from playing for Scotland after making V-signs while sat on the sidelines at Hampden Park.

20 years ago

A Spain side featuring Xavi and Carlos Marchena beats Japan 4-0 in the Final to win the World Youth Cup in Nigeria. Mali finish third after beating Uruguay 1-0 in a play-off.

30 years ago

Ninety six football fans lose their lives in the Hillsborough disaster before Liverpool's FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest at Sheffield Wednesday's ground.

40 years ago

Barcelona beat Beveren of Belgium 1-0 both home and away to reach the European Cup-winners Cup Final for the first time, where they triumph 4-3 against Fortuna Dusseldorf.

50 years ago

Don Revie's Leeds United become league champions for the first time, finishing six points clear of runners-up Liverpool, while newly promoted Queens Park Rangers go straight back down.

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World Service

NOW INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

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China

CAMERON WILSON

KEY DATES
Season started March 1, 2019
Season ends December 1, 2019

Three-way fight for league title

CSL big guns line up naturalised players

The Chinese Super League kicked off to the usual fanfare in March, but strange new policies have again cast a shadow over the country's football.

This season the battle for the title is likely to be a three-way fight between holders Shanghai SIPG, seven-time winners Guangzhou Evergrande and a resurgent Beijing Guoan.

In a bid to regain the championship that they failed to win last year for the first time since 2010, Evergrande were particularly busy in the winter transfer window. They signed no fewer than five China internationals, all aged 24 or under, the most notable of whom was Beijing Guoan winger Wei Shihao. They also signed Everton defender Tyias Browning who is set to take Chinese nationality through his grandfather later this season; by registering as a domestic player he will free up one of the club's four foreign-player slots.

Evergrande's youth-focused transfer dealings were a response to the core of their seven-in-a-row championship side ageing. Captain Zheng Zhi, formerly of Charlton Athletic, is now 38, while stalwarts such as national-team stars Gao Lin, Feng Xiaoting, Yu Hanchao and Zhan Linpeng will all be on the wrong side of 30 by the end of the season.

In a transitional year, coach Fabio Cannavaro has a task on his hands moulding the newly acquired talent to replace the highly successful veteran spine of the team. However, in ex-Benfica striker Talisca he has a powerful weapon. The Brazil under-23 international scored 16 goals in 18 league games last year after joining on loan and he has now signed a permanent deal, along with ex Tottenham Hotspur and Barcelona midfielder Paulinho, who is undoubtedly one of the league's top playmakers.

Playmaker... Paulinho has a permanent deal with Guangzhou Evergrande

This year, however, Evergrande will be fighting with one hand voluntarily tied behind their back. In a bizarre statement, chairman Xu Jiayin said the team would start each league game with just two foreigners, instead of the maximum permitted three, in order to give Chinese talent as much chance as possible to develop. Notwithstanding concerns about the calibre of player that such talent will play alongside, Evergrande can still field a very strong starting XI and rumours of their demise as a force in the Chinese game are premature.

Beijing Guoan are touted by some as favourites to take their first CSL title since 2009. The capital side focused on foreign talent in the winter window – but with a twist. Former Arsenal youth Nico

Preview

Super Cup...Shanghai SIPG (in red) take on Beijing Guoan

Yennaris joined from Brentford, alongside Norwegian youth international John Hou Saeter from Staebek. Thanks to being of partial Chinese descent, both will play as naturalised Chinese players, with Yennaris now being known as Li Ke and Saeter as Hou Yongyong.

Also joining was South Korean international Kim Min-jae, who is one of the continent's most highly rated young defenders. The capture of the 22-year-old from K-League side Jeonbuk Motors was greeted with glee by fans in the capital and raised hopes that this could be their team's year. Guoan doubled down with another big transfer, Chinese international Zhang Yuning joining from West Bromwich Albion following a fruitless year on loan to Eredivisie side Den Haag. Despite Zhang's modest record in Europe, the 22-year-old striker is still highly rated in China and his signing was seen as a real statement of intent from Guoan.

In something of a contrast, the reigning champions Shanghai SIPG had a quiet window – they have not signed a single player since splurging on Brazilian forward Hulk and former Chelsea man Oscar in 2017.

Stability was the key to their success last year, but the second-city club face a massive change this season with the departure of Wu Lei to La Liga side Espanyol. It is impossible to overstate the size of the hole the Nanjing-born forward leaves in SIPG's squad. In a phenomenal season, he scored 27 goals in 29 CSL games last term and there simply aren't any Chinese players of his standard to replace him – which is a real problem in a league where teams must field at least eight domestic players. Former Porto boss Vitor Pereira will look to Shanghainese winger Lyu Wenjun, who frequently came off the bench to great effect last season, to fill the gap left by Wu.

Beijing Guoan are touted by some as favourites to take their first CSL title since 2009

A spritely and nimble wide forward with great technique, awareness and an eye for goal, Wu made encouraging start to his European career, getting on the scoresheet once and making an assist in his first six games. Unsurprisingly, this rare good news story caused the Chinese football media to get carried away with a torrent of superlatives after he became the first Chinese player ever to score a goal in La Liga, and the first in a top European league since Shao Jiayi for Cottbus in the Bundesliga in 2008.

While Wu is undoubtedly one of the best players China has produced, the melodramatic reaction to his modest

Opening game...Shenzhen (in red) beat Hebei China Fortune 3-1

initial success shows how long Chinese football has been in the doldrums.

SIPG's sale of such an utterly irreplaceable hot property was widely believed to be at the behest of the Chinese FA, who deemed it beneficial to the sport's progression in the country. And as is so often the case in a league where off-field matters are so influential, Wu's transfer overseas was not the only display of power politics in the Chinese close season.

One of the most intriguing developments over the winter was the signing of naturalised Chinese players. In addition to Beijing Guoan acquiring Yennaris and Saeter, and Guangzhou's purchase of Browning, Shanghai Shenhua signed Alexander N'Doumbou from Bulgarian top division side Vereya. The Gabonese international has a Chinese mother and successfully gained Chinese citizenship in order to play as a domestic player.

> One of the most intriguing developments over the winter was the signing of naturalised Chinese players

Naturalised...Gabon international Alexander N'Doumbou will now be known as Qian Jiegei

In a shambolic turn of events, a story leaked by a journalist on Chinese social media less than 24 hours before the first CSL game kicked off, claimed that no naturalised players would be permitted to play in the opening two rounds of the CSL. This was despite the appearance of Saeter for Beijing Guoan when they lost 2-0 to Shanghai SIPG in the season-opening China Super Cup.

Although there was no official CFA announcement, in what was certainly not a coincidence no naturalised player featured in any of the first two games.

As is now a regular occurrence, supporters and local media complained bitterly that the CFA had once again compromised sporting integrity, this time by having different player eligibility rules for different matches. Yet the wait for an official explanation as to why the restriction was put in place at the last moment goes on – leading many to conclude that government interference was to blame yet again. WS

CHINESE SUPER

BEIJING GUOAN

IN Hou Yongyong (Chn; Staebek, Nor), Kim Min-jae (SKo; Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, SKo), Li Ke (Chn; Brentford, Eng), Zhang Yuning (Chn; West Bromwich Albion, Eng), Zou Dehai (Chn; Zhejiang Greentown)

OUT Jonathan Soriano (Spa; Al Hilal, Sau), Wei Shihao (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande)

BEIJING RENHA

IN Sone Aluko (Nga; Reading, Eng, loan)

OUT Benjamin Moukandjo (Cam; Jiangsu Suning, loan return)

CHONGQING LIFAN

IN Adrian Mierzejewski (Pol; Changchun Yatai)

OUT Seba (Bra; Olympiakos, Gre, loan return)

DALIAN YIFANG

IN Alex Akande (HK; Yanbian Funde), Emmanuel Boateng (Gha; Levante, Spa), Marek Hamsik (Slk; Napoli, Ita), Li Jianbin (Chn; Shanghai Shenhua), Zhao Mingjian (Chn; Hebei China Fortune), Zhao Xuri (Chn; Tianjin Tianhai), Zheng Long (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande, loan)

OUT Nicolas Gaitan (Arg; Chicago Fire, USA), Duvier Riascos (Col; Universidad Catolica, Chl, loan)

GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE

IN Tyias Browning (Eng; Everton, Eng); Gao Zhunyi (Chn; Hebei China Fortune), He Chao (Chn; Changchun Yatai), Liu Yiming (Chn; Tianjin Tianhai), Park Ji-soo (SKo;

Preview

Gyeongnam, SKo), Wei Shihao (Chn; Beijing Guoan), Wu Shaocong (Chn; Shimizu S-Pulse, Jap)
OUT Alan (Bra; Tianjin Tianhai, loan), Ricardo Goulart (Bra; Palmeiras, Bra, loan), Kim Young-gwon (SKo; Gamba Osaka, Jap)

GUANGZHOU R&F

IN Mousa Dembele (Blg; Tottenham Hotspur, Eng), Dia Saba (Isr; Hapoel Be'er Sheva, Isr)
OUT Junior Urso (Bra; Corinthians, Bra), Renatinho (Bra; Tianjin Tianhai, loan)

HEBEI CHINA FORTUNE

IN Marcao (Bra; Gyeongnam, SKo), Andy Russell (HKo; Liaoning)
OUT Hernanes (Bra; Sao Paulo, Bra)

HENAN JIANYE

IN Tim Chow (CT; Spartak Subotica, Ser), Henrique Dourado (Bra; Flamengo, Bra), Franck Ohandza (Cam; Shenzhen)
OUT Ricardo Vaz Te (Por; Qingdao Huanghai), Wang Shangyuan (Chn) (Guangzhou Evergrande)

JIANGSU SUNING

IN none
OUT Benjamin Moukandjo (Cam; released)

SHANDONG LUNENG

IN Marouane Fellaini (Blg; Manchester United, Eng)
OUT Diego Tardelli (Bra; Gremio, Bra)

SHANGHAI SHENHUA

IN Odion Ighalo (Nga; Changun Yatai), Alexander N'Doumbou (Chn; Vereya, Bul)
OUT Demba Ba (Sen; Istanbul Basaksehir, Tur), Obafemi Martins (Nga; released)

Ex-Spurs... Mousa Dembele

Loan...Sone Aluko (left)

United move... Maroune Fellaini

Goalgetter... Odion Ighalo

SHANGHAI SIPG

IN none
OUT Wu Lei (Chn; Espanyol, Spa)

SHENZHEN

IN Cheikh M'Bengue (Sen; Saint-Etienne, Fra), Ola Kamara (Nor; LA Galaxy, USA); Ole Selnaes (Nor; Saint-Etienne, Fra)
OUT Pa Dibba (Gam; Shanghai Shenxin, loan), Franck Ohandza (Cam; Henan Jianye)

TIANJIN TEDA

IN Rong Hao (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande, loan), Sandro Wagner (Ger; Bayern Munich, Ger)
OUT John Obi Mikel (Nga; Middlesbrough, Eng)

TIANJIN TIANHAI

IN Alan (Bra; Guangzhou Evergrande Taobao, loan), Liao Lisheng (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande, loan), Renatinho (Bra; Guangzhou R&F, loan), Wen Jiabao (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande, loan)
OUT Liu Yiming (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande), Anthony Modeste (Fra; Cologne, Ger), Zhang Xiuwei (Chn; Guangzhou Evergrande), Zhao Xuri (Chn; Dalian Yifang)

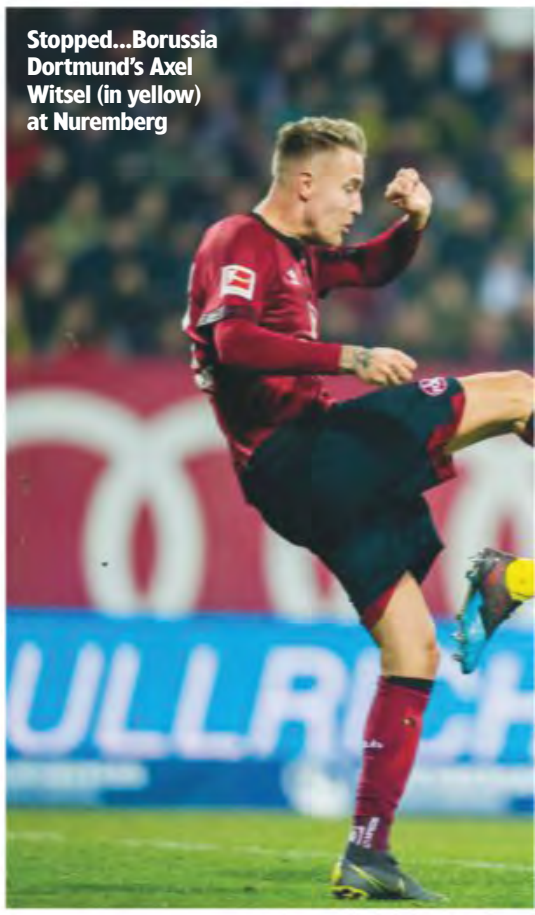
WUHAN ZALL

IN Leo Baptistao (Bra; Espanyol, Spa), Stephane Mbia (Cam; Toulouse, Cam)
OUT Marcelo Moreno (Bol; Shijiazhuang Ever Bright), Pedro Junior (Bra; Kashima Antlers, loan return)

FEBRUARY 14-MARCH 14, 2019

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world


Stopped...Borussia Dortmund's Axel Witsel (in yellow) at Nuremberg

Thursday February 14

CHILE: The country's president, Sebastian Pinera, says Chile has agreed to join Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay in making a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup.
ENGLAND: Manchester United reveal they paid Jose Mourinho and his staff £19.6m in compensation following their sacking. Watford part company with head of academy Darren Sarll after an investigation into allegations of bullying.
EUROPA LEAGUE: BATE Borisov beat Arsenal 1-0, while Sevilla win 1-0 at Lazio and Villarreal overcome Sporting 1-0 in Lisbon.
FRANCE: Monaco sack vice-president Vadim Vasilyev.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone signs a contract extension that ties him to the club until 2022.
URUGUAY: Gustavo Ferreyra is appointed coach of Uruguay's under-20 side after Fabian Coito leaves to take charge of Honduras' national side.

Friday February 15

CHILE: Defending champions Universidad Catolica start the new season with a 2-1 victory away to newly-promoted Coquimbo Unido.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Colin Nixon is sacked by Ards after a sixth league defeat in a row – a 3-0 loss at home to Institute – which leaves the team 14 points from safety at the bottom of the table.
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: Derry City kick off the new league season by beating UCD 3-0.
SPAIN: Barcelona boss Ernesto Valverde signs a one-year contract extension, with the option of a further year.

Saturday February 16

GERMANY: At 40 years, four months and 13 days, Claudio Pizarro becomes the oldest goalscorer in Bundesliga history with the equaliser in Werder Bremen's 1-1 draw at Hertha Berlin.
JAPAN: Leandro Damiao is the match winner as J.League champions Kawasaki Frontale beat Emperor's Cup winners Urawa Red Diamonds to lift the season-opening Super Cup.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Linfield beat Ballymena United 1-0 in the Final to win the League Cup for the first time since 2008.
PERU: Champions in 2018, Sporting Cristal begin this season's Apertura with a 2-0 win at Sport Huancayo.

Sunday February 17

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP U20: Mali win the title for the first time, beating Senegal on penalties in the Final. Both finalists qualify for the World Under-20 finals, along with South Africa and Nigeria.
SPAIN: Sergio Ramos is sent off in injury time as Real Madrid lose 2-1 at home to Girona.

Winner...Leandro Damiao of Kawasaki Frontale takes on Urawa Red Diamonds

Monday February 18

ENGLAND: In a repeat of last year's FA Cup Final, Manchester United beat holders Chelsea 2-0 at Stamford Bridge to reach this season's quarter-finals.
GERMANY: Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund draw 0-0 at bottom club Nuremberg.
PARAGUAY: Former Celta, Sevilla and Bilbao boss Eduardo Berizzo is appointed coach of Paraguay.
ZIMBABWE: Winners of last year's tournament, which was held in South Africa, Zimbabwe pull out of hosting the 2019 COSAFA Cup, suggesting they do not have enough time to prepare.

Tuesday February 19

BELGIUM: Former Lokeren and Genk coach Peter Maes is arrested for a second time on suspicion of money laundering and corruption.
ITALY: Juventus' 31-year-old midfielder Sami Khedira is diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat and will be sidelined while undergoing treatment for atrial arrhythmia.
PORTUGAL: FIFA fine Porto 50,000 Swiss francs for allowing Malta-based investment fund Doyen to influence the club's transfers and failing to provide the correct data for the Transfer Matching System.
SPAIN: The Spanish Super Cup will expand to four teams next season, with two semi-finals and a Final to be played outside the country, if

approved by the Spanish Football Federation assembly in April.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Lyon draw 0-0 at home to Barcelona, while Liverpool's game at home to Bayern Munich is also goalless.

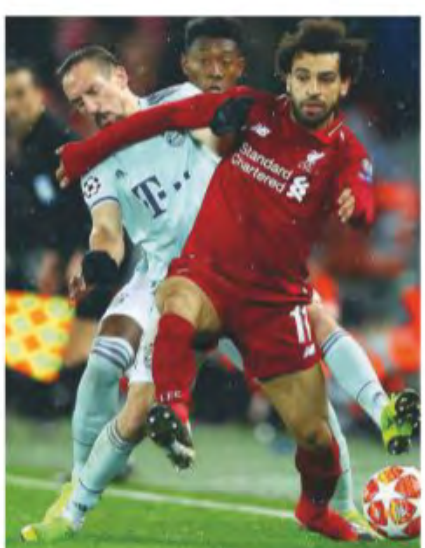
USA: A second third-tier league is set to get underway after the US Soccer Federation provisionally sanctions the National Independent Soccer Association.

Wednesday February 20

BOTSWANA: National coach David Bright is sacked following the team's failure to win any of their five Africa Nations Cup qualifiers so far.

CHINA: Manchester City's owners, City Football Group, buy a stake in Chinese third-tier club Sichuan Jiuniu – their seventh club.

EGYPT: Al Masry Club Stadium, which was known as Port Said Stadium when 74 people died during a riot in 2012, is chosen as one of the six venues across five cities, to stage this year's ➤



Goalless...Liverpool (in red) and Bayern

South America

TIM VICKERY

US Copa offer is rejected

But Ecuador game could set precedent for European clubs

With the Copa America staging an extra tournament next year to aid the competition's switch from odd to even years, an offer to stage the event in the United States has been rejected by the South American Football Confederation, CONMEBOL.

Kicking off in June, Brazil will stage this year's edition, while Ecuador will be hosts in 2024. And in trying to find a location for 2020, CONMEBOL's decision to reject the USA is likely to be politically motivated, with one eye on the 2030 World Cup.

The confederation's plan is to celebrate the centenary of the World Cup by taking it back to Uruguay. However, with only one city of note, Uruguay cannot dream of doing it alone. Paraguay are involved, Chile are knocking at the door and Bolivia want in. But no matter how many South American countries share the tournament, the bulk of the games would be in Argentina.

However, the fact that December's Libertadores Cup Final second leg had to be moved to Madrid is hugely damaging. After being seen as incapable of organising a match between its two biggest clubs, hosting a successful Copa in 2020 might help to wipe the slate clean.

There may also be a financial explanation for CONMEBOL's rejection of the offer from the north.

When the United States staged a successful Centenary Copa in 2016, the superiority of the South American sides over their rivals from the CONCACAF region was quite obvious, and this strengthens the hand of the former as they continue to look northwards in expectation of securing a slice of the growing US football market.

This much is obvious from a decision announced by CONMEBOL in March in which the confederation gave its blessing for an Ecuadorian league game to be played in the USA. The plan is for Barcelona of Guayaquil to face Deportivo Cuenca in New Jersey, on April 14, in the ninth round of Ecuador's top flight.

There is little doubt that this would draw a big crowd as Barcelona have a huge fan base and there is a sizeable Ecuadorian community in the area. Three years ago, fans flocked to the stadium in New Jersey to watch Ecuador thrash Haiti 4-0 in the Copa.

April date...Ecuador's Barcelona are set to play in the USA

This move, then, is less predatory than, say, teams from England or Spain taking league games to the US. It is not a case of teams from outside parachuting in to the possible detriment of local clubs; here the target audience would be people who grew up as fans of Cuenca or Barcelona and who already support these teams.

> The plan is for Barcelona of Guayaquil to face Deportivo Cuenca in New Jersey, on April 14, in the ninth round of Ecuador's top flight

Even so, if the game is allowed to go ahead it would set a significant precedent and one of great interest to the major European countries.

Seldom have the Premier League and La Liga had such cause to pay close attention to developments in the championship of Ecuador. WS

South Korea

JOHN DUERDEN

Jeonbuk the team to beat

League in shadow of Japan and China

Throughout its long history, the Korean peninsula has looked warily east and west to the twin powers of China and Japan. These days in the southern half of the peninsula, the gaze of football fans is filled with envy.

Across the Yellow Sea is a Chinese Super League that has been spending big since 2011, while the K-League is accustomed to seeing talent depart rather than arrive. Jeonbuk Motors, champions in four of the past five seasons, have lost long-term coach Choi Kang-hee to China and centre-back Kim Min-jae to Beijing Guoan. But the club has replaced Choi with Jose Mourinho's former assistant Jose Morais and Jeonbuk – who were Asian champions in 2006 and 2016 – will be the team to beat again this season.

Seoul, who were champions in 2016, finished next to bottom last season and only survived the drop by winning a relegation play-off. Experienced stars such as Park Chu-young, formerly of Arsenal, Ha Dae-sung and Go Yo-han are still around and former boss Choi Yong-soo has returned, but a title challenge would be quite an ask. Fans will probably settle for finishing in the top half of the "split" – the league adopting a two-stage season in 2012, dividing the 12 teams with five of the 38 games remaining.

Hopeful... Jeonbuk Motors keeper Song Bum-keun

Pressure... Gyeongnam also have the Champions League to deal with this term

It remains to be seen how Gyeongnam, who had a best-ever season with a second-place finish last time out, will manage now they have the Asian Champions League to deal with, as well as the departure of last season's top scorer, with Marcao moving to China.

Four-time champions Suwon Bluewings were sixth last season, with Pohang Steelers fourth, and it is hoped that both can return to form as league attendances fell last season to an average of just over 5,000 – less than half of the figure of a decade earlier.

Although Incheon United, and from this season, Daegu, have moved out of massive World Cup stadiums that were often hard to get to, most clubs still occupy arenas that are far too big for them. Daegu, for example, grew tired of their 3,000 supporters rattling around in a 60,000-plus capacity stadium.

Money is scarce and while the big conglomerates such as Samsung and Hyundai still bankroll clubs, they don't splash the cash in the style of bygone days as they look to cut costs. "City-owned" clubs such as Incheon, Daejeon and Daegu have not yet managed to show the corporate clubs how to build ties with the local communities.

It is in the field of community relations, more than signing big-name stars, where Korea falls behind Japan. The match-fixing scandal in 2011 – when more than 50 players and coaches, past and present, were

Debut...Ryu Jae-moon of Daegu in Champions League action

charged with rigging results – was not as damaging to the league's reputation as it may have been. But nor did it prove to be the turning point that many hoped for.

Despite the lack of money, support and media exposure, standards are still high in Asian terms. Korean clubs have been continental champions no less than 11 times – as many as the next two most successful, Japan and Saudi Arabia, combined.

Last season, even a Suwon team that was struggling domestically reached the semi-finals before narrowly losing to Kashima Antlers in a titanic tussle over two legs. And in March, Daegu went to Melbourne Victory in their first-ever continental game and won 3-1 against a team with much more Asian experience and considerably more resources, so talent is still being produced.

The question of how to turn things around has been the major topic in Seoul for years, and the problem is nobody really knows the answer.

Perhaps the most that can be hoped for is that attendances grow a little, the football is more exciting and a couple of stars emerge from a youth-development system that still produces good talent.

For now, that will have to do. WS

➤ African Nations Cup.

FRANCE: Kylian Mbappe reaches 20 league goals in a season for the first time as Paris Saint-Germain thrash Montpellier 5-1.

OMAN: Erwin Koeman, the older brother of Holland coach Ronald, takes charge of Oman's national team.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Two late goals see Manchester City come from behind to win 3-2 away to Schalke, while Atletico Madrid beat Juventus 2-0 in Spain.

Thursday February 21

EUROPA LEAGUE: Arsenal, Dinamo Zagreb, Red Bull Salzburg and Zenit overturn first-leg losses to reach the last 16.

FRANCE: Former Bordeaux and Marseille boss Rolland Courbis joins Fabien Mercadal's coaching staff at Ligue 1 strugglers Caen.

Friday February 22

ENGLAND: Chelsea are banned from signing players in the next two transfer windows for breaching rules in relation to youth players.

FIFA: This year's Under-17 World Cup is taken away from planned hosts Peru due to "organisational and infrastructure challenges linked to the event delivery".

GREECE: AEK are ordered to play their next two UEFA competition home games behind closed doors and handed a suspended ban from European competitions "for a probationary period of two years" following crowd trouble at their game against Ajax in November.

JAPAN: Cerezo Osaka kick off the new J.League season with a 1-0 win at home to Vissel Kobe.

Saturday February 23

SPAIN: Lionel Messi scores the 50th hat-trick of his career as Barcelona beat Sevilla 4-2.

Sunday February 24

AUSTRIA: Red Bull Salzburg lose in the league for the first time this term, beaten 2-0 at Rapid Vienna.

BELGIUM: Anderlecht draw 2-2 at home to Club Brugge.

ENGLAND: Leicester City sack Claude Puel following Saturday's 4-1 loss at home to Crystal Palace. Manchester City win the League Cup on penalties after Chelsea keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga defies manager Maurizio Sarri's attempt to substitute him.

HOLLAND: Ten-man Feyenoord hold PSV to a 1-1 draw, while Ajax win 5-1 at ADO Den Haag.

ITALY: After a five-minute VAR delay, Jordan Veretout scores a 101st-minute penalty as Fiorentina draw 3-3 with Internazionale.

SAUDI ARABIA: Croatia's Slaven Bilic leaves Al Ittihad, where he is replaced as coach by Jose Luis Sierra of Chile.

Monday February 25

MEXICO: Toluca sack coach Hernan Cristante ahead of Thursday's CONCACAF Champions League second-leg game against Sporting Kansas City.

REP OF IRELAND: Bohemians beat Shamrock Rovers 1-0 and go above them at the top of the table.

TURKEY: Fenerbahce come from 3-0 down to draw 3-3 at Istanbul rivals Besiktas and move out of the relegation zone.

Tuesday February 26

ENGLAND: Brendan Rodgers leaves Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic to manage Leicester City.

FRANCE: Bordeaux sack coach Ricardo Gomes.

SCOTLAND: Neil Lennon returns to Celtic in place of Brendan Rodgers until the end of the season.

VIETNAM: Hanoi kick off their AFC Cup campaign with a 10-0 thrashing of Cambodia's Nagaworld.

ZAMBIA: Sven Vandenbroeck is told his contract as national coach will not be renewed when it expires next month.

Wednesday February 27

ENGLAND: Chelsea beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-0, while Arsenal and Liverpool both score five, against Bournemouth and Watford respectively.

HOLLAND: Ajax beat Feyenoord 3-0 in Rotterdam to reach the Dutch Cup Final for the first time since 2014.

SPAIN: Luis Suarez scores twice as Barcelona win 3-0 away to Real Madrid and triumph 4-1 on aggregate to reach a sixth consecutive Spanish Cup Final.

Thursday February 28

ENGLAND: Fulham appoint Scott Parker as caretaker manager until the end of the season after sacking Claudio Ranieri.

SPAIN: Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos is handed a two-game ban by UEFA "for clearly receiving a yellow card on purpose" during the first leg of the Champions League tie at Ajax to make sure he would not miss a potential quarter-final game.

TURKEY: Fifteen years after last leading the national side, Senol Gunes agrees a four-year deal ➤

➤ to coach Turkey's national side.
USA: Atlanta United win 4-0 against Costa Rica's Herediano to overturn a 3-1 first-leg deficit and reach the quarter-finals of the CONCACAF Champions League.

Friday March 1

CHINA: Defending champions Shanghai SIPG beat Shanghai Shenhua 4-0 on the opening day of the new CSL season.
GERMANY: Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund are beaten 2-1 at Augsburg.

Saturday March 2

ENGLAND: Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang misses a last-minute penalty in a 1-1 draw at Tottenham Hotspur.
GABON: Akanda striker Herman Tsinga collapses and dies during a top-flight game against Missile.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich win 5-1 at Borussia Monchengladbach to go joint top of the league.
ITALY: Lazio beat city rivals Roma 3-0 in the Rome derby.
PORTUGAL: Benfica come from behind to win 2-1 at Porto and leapfrog their opponents to go top of the Primeira Liga.
SPAIN: Barcelona win 1-0 at Real Madrid with an Ivan Rakitic goal.

Sunday March 3

HOLLAND: Robin van Persie scores a hat-trick to move past 200 career league goals as Feyenoord beat Emmen 4-0.
ITALY: Juventus win 2-1 at second-place Napoli and increase their lead at the top of the table to 16 points.
USA: MLS Cup champions Atlanta United lose 2-0 at DC United in their opening league game.

Monday March 4

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: The group stage gets underway as Lokomotiv Tashkent of Uzbekistan beat UAE's Al Wahda 2-0.
NIGERIA: Nigeria international Samuel Kalu's mother is released six days after being kidnapped, although it is unknown whether a reported ransom was paid.
SPAIN: Gareth Bale's agent, Jonathan Barnett calls Real Madrid's fans "a disgrace" after they jeered their Welsh forward when he was substituted against Barcelona on Saturday. "Those fans should be kissing his feet," says Barnett.

Tuesday March 5

CONCACAF CHAMP LEAGUE: Mexican sides Santos Laguna and Tigres both win quarter- ➤

Germany

NICK BIDWELL

Low axes Bayern trio

Boateng, Hummels and Muller dropped by national coach

Joachim Low metaphorically kicked a hornet's nest with his bolt-from-the-blue decision to inform three of his most experienced players – centre-backs Jerome Boateng and Mats Hummels plus attacking-third freewheeler Thomas Muller – that their services were no longer required.

The Bayern Munich trio, all World Cup winners in 2014, boast 246 caps between them, and for a decade they represented the beating heart of Low's invariably dominant side, exemplary figures who gave the *Nationalmannschaft* an extra dimension.

However, all three have been showing signs of wear and tear of late. The injury-prone body of Boateng has taken a battering over the years; Hummels is increasingly vulnerable to pace; and in the dual role of space-finder and marksman, Muller is not quite as effective as he used to be. Such assessments must have influenced Low's thinking.

"We look at this year as a new beginning for the national team," explained Low in an official communique. "With the Euro 2020 qualifying campaign about to start, we wanted to make clear our desire to embark on a fresh start. We want to give the team a new look.

> "We want to give the team a new look. I'm sure it's the correct move"
> National coach Joachim Low

"I'm sure it's the correct move. Young players in the national team will be given the space to fully develop. Now it's up to them to take responsibility."

Low's axeman act certainly polarised opinion, with many believing he simply had to turn the page in the wake of Germany's disastrous early exit from Russia 2018. Others see the triple dismissal as a clumsy exercise in blame-shifting, with Low attempting to bolster his creaking authority.

Another group of critics are attacking the Germany boss for not performing the cull sooner, arguing that any radical personnel makeover should have occurred back in August. Why put it off for six months? And why make the announcement at such a crucial stage of Bayern's season, with vital Champions League and Bundesliga fixtures looming?

Low and the German federation also find

Out...(from right) Thomas Muller, Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng

Big decision...Low substitutes Muller during the World Cup

themselves in the dock for the cold, rather off-hand manner with which they went about the whole business: the pre-prepared statements to the media, the cliched words of appreciation, the end-game finality of it all.

And why the need for permanent exclusion? It surely would have made more sense for Low to keep his options open, pick his squad from game to game, and to leave the selection door ajar. Hummels and Muller still start for Bayern, they are only 30 and 29 years old respectively, and might well have forced their way back in. The trio deserved more respect.

Their Bayern and Germany team-mate, defender Joshua Kimmich apparently agrees. "When I look at it from the standpoint of a player, my view is that the way this was done was not OK," he told the Munich daily *Abendzeitung*. "I can see why the boys concerned are disappointed. I myself was surprised.

"I only know the national team with these three guys in it. In the last 10 years they shaped the team. They helped make us world champions."

It's often forgotten how ruthless "Jogi" Low can be. He did not blink a decade ago when erasing skipper Michael Ballack from his plans.

In the case of the "Bayern Three", he has proved similarly unsentimental. WS

➤ final first legs 2-0 in the USA, beating New York Red Bulls and Houston Dynamo respectively.
PARAGUAY: Adrian Martinez scores twice in the opening four minutes as Libertad beat Universidad Catolica of Chile 4-1 in the Libertadores Cup.
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Winners for the past three years, Real Madrid go out of this season's competition in the round of 16 after losing 4-1 at to home to Ajax, while Tottenham Hotspur beat Borussia Dortmund 4-0 on aggregate.

Wednesday March 6

CHILE: Patricio Rubio becomes the first Chile-born player to score four goals in a Libertadores Cup game as Universidad de Concepcion beat Peru's Sporting Cristal 5-4.
ENGLAND: On paid leave since January 2018 following accusations of racism and bullying, Newcastle United confirm Peter Beardsley has left his role as under-23 coach.
HOLLAND: Jaap Stam, who took charge at PEC Zwolle in December on an 18-month contract, will take over from Giovanni Van Bronckhorst as Feyenoord coach in the summer.
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: VAR gives Manchester United victory over Paris Saint-Germain with a 94th-minute penalty and Porto success against Roma, also with a spot-kick, in extra time.

Thursday March 7

ARGENTINA: Lionel Messi is named in an Argentina squad for the first time since the 2018 World Cup, ahead of friendlies against Venezuela and Morocco.
ENGLAND: UEFA open a formal investigation into Manchester City's financial conduct and alleged Financial Fairplay violations.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Arsenal and Benfica lose away to Rennes and Dinamo Zagreb respectively, while Slavia Prague draw 2-2 at Sevilla.
ITALY: Roma sack coach Eusebio Di Francesco following Wednesday's defeat by Porto in the last 16 of the Champions League.
WALES: Colwyn Bay will leave the English pyramid and return to a Welsh league next season.

Saturday March 9

ENGLAND: Raheem Sterling's hat-trick gives Manchester City a 3-1 victory over Watford to move them four points clear of Liverpool, who have a game in hand.
GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski scores twice to become the all-time top-scoring non-German player in ➤

➤ the Bundesliga with 197 goals as Bayern Munich thrash Wolfsburg 6-0 to top the table for the first time since September.
GREECE: AEK draw 0-0 at home to Panathinaikos in the Athens derby and move into third place, behind PAOK and Olympiakos.
HOLLAND: Luuk De Jong gets his 21st league goal of the campaign as PSV pull eight points clear at the top of the table with a 2-0 victory over bottom side NAC Breda.
SOUTH AFRICA: Mamelodi Sundowns go through to the knockout stage of the CAF Champions League by beating Nigeria's Lobi Stars 3-0.

Sunday March 10

ENGLAND: Arsenal win 2-0 at home to Manchester United.
FRANCE: Mario Balotelli gets the only goal of the game as Marseille beat his former side Nice 1-0.
ITALY: Foggia fans detonate an explosive device outside a factory belonging to the club sponsors and set fire to the car of striker Pietro Iemmello after Saturday's derby loss to Lecce saw the team slide into the Serie B relegation zone.
SPAIN: Wissam Ben Yedder grabs a 13-minute hat-trick in the second half as Sevilla cruise to a 5-2 win against Real Sociedad.

Monday March 11

HOLLAND: Former national coach Louis Van Gaal announces his retirement from football aged 67.
SPAIN: Nine months after standing down as Real Madrid coach, Zinedine Zidane returns to the post after Santiago Solari is sacked.

Tuesday March 12

GERMANY: Bruno Labbadia says he will stand down as coach of Wolfsburg at the end of the season.
MEXICO: Santos Laguna and Tigres both beat US opposition – New York Red Bulls and Houston Dynamo respectively – to reach the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Champions League.
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: West Ham United midfielder Declan Rice is named young player of the year in the FAI International Awards – despite switching his allegiance to England last month.
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: A record-equalling eighth hat-trick in the competition for Cristiano Ronaldo sees Juventus overturn a 2-0 first-leg deficit to beat Atletico Madrid 3-2 and qualify for the

Champions League

GAVIN HAMILTON

Messi and Ronaldo confirm star quality

Knockout stage provides comebacks and controversies

The first knockout stage of this season's Champions League produced a series of stunning comebacks, a succession of VAR controversies, the exit of holders Real Madrid and confirmation that Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo remain the world's two outstanding players.

Real Madrid, champions in four of the past five seasons, were ousted by Ajax, who staged a remarkable second-leg comeback to triumph 4-1 in Madrid and win 5-3 on aggregate.

VAR, in use for the first time in the competition, had come to Madrid's aid in the first leg in Amsterdam when Nicolas Tagliafico's goal from an Ajax corner was ruled out for a marginal offside. A late Marco Asensio goal gave the defending champions a 2-1 lead to take back to Spain, where Ajax showed no inhibitions, storming into a two-goal lead within 18 minutes through Hakim Ziyech and David Neres. Dusan Tadic, the creator of both opening goals, added a brilliant third himself, with the goal confirmed by VAR after a lengthy delay despite complaints the ball had gone out of play in the build-up. Asensio pulled a goal back for Madrid but Lasse Schone's looping free-kick completed Madrid's humiliation.

Madrid's former star Ronaldo single-handedly dragged Juventus back into their tie with Atletico Madrid, scoring a hat-trick to overturn a 2-0 first-leg deficit. Atletico coach Diego Simeone's crotch-grabbing celebrations had hogged the headlines in the first leg, when defenders Jose Gimenez and Diego Godin scored late goals. But Simeone had no answer to Juve coach Max Allegri's tactics in Turin, where an early Juventus goal was harshly ruled out by VAR for a challenge on Atletico keeper Jan Oblak. Ronaldo rose to head in a Federico Bernadeshi cross for the first goal and produced another fine header for the second before completing his hat-trick with a penalty.

"It was always going to be a special night," said Ronaldo. "This is the mentality of champions. We enjoyed a magical night."

Simeone said: "We made many mistakes, but I mean me, not the players. Tactically they were better."

The most dramatic comeback came in Paris where a controversial injury-time penalty was converted by Marcus Rashford to give Manchester United victory over Paris Saint-Germain on away goals. UEFA issued an unexpected, but welcome, defence of the VAR decision to award the late spot-kick for a handball by Presnel Kimpembe.

> "This is the mentality of champions. We enjoyed a magical night"
> Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo

PSG had gone into the tie in a strong position having won 2-0 at Old Trafford despite missing the injured Neymar and Edinson Cavani. United were missing several key players in the return and handed important roles to Fred, Scott McTominay and Andreas Perreira, who shone alongside Romelu Lukaku, scorer of two first-half goals.

The three other English teams all won comfortably against German opposition, ensuring four English

Superb...Cristiano Ronaldo heads home his second goal against Atletico Madrid

quarter-finals. Manchester City set a new club best in Europe by beating Schalke 7-0.

Wednesday March 13

COPA AMERICA: CONMEBOL say the 2020 tournament will be co-hosted by Argentina and Colombia.
ITALY: Dismissed in November, Aurelio Andreazzoli returns as coach of Empoli after they sacked Beppe Iachini on Tuesday. Attilio Lombardo joins the national team as Roberto Mancini's assistant.
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Last year's runners-up Liverpool and Barcelona complete the quarter-final line-up with wins over Bayern Munich and Lyon respectively.
USA: Atlanta United win 1-0 at home to Monterrey of Mexico but exit the CONCACAF Champions League 3-1 on aggregate.

Through...Nicolas Sanchez of Monterrey

Thursday March 14

BAHRAIN: Portuguese coach Helio Sousa replaces Miroslav Soukup in charge of Bahrain's national team.
ENGLAND: Former Manchester United and England midfielder Paul Scholes leaves his first managerial role, with League Two side Oldham Athletic, after just 31 days.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Arsenal overturn a two-goal first-leg deficit to beat Rennes, while Eintracht Frankfurt win away to Internazionale and Slavia Prague shock Sevilla.
GERMANY: Schalke sack coach Domenico Tedesco after their 7-0 thrashing at the hands of Manchester City in the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday. Former boss Huub Stevens and ex-midfielder Mike Buskens will take charge of their next game, against RB Leipzig on Saturday.
SPAIN: Real Madrid announce the signing of defender Eder Militao, who will join from Porto for a reported €50m in the summer. WS

clubs in the quarter-finals for the first time since 2009. It also meant no German teams made the final eight for the first time since 2006.

Tottenham Hotspur were particularly impressive against Borussia Dortmund. A sparkling second-half performance at Wembley gave Spurs a 3-0 lead to take to Germany for the second leg. Dortmund welcomed backed Marco Reus and Paco Alcacer from injury for the return but failed to score despite a first-half onslaught and Harry Kane scored the only goal of the game for the visitors early in the second half.

Manchester City suffered an early setback against Schalke, conceding two first-half penalties which were both converted by Nabil Bentaleb. But they recovered to win the first leg 3-2 thanks to late goals from Leroy Sane and Raheem Sterling and then turned on the style back in Manchester, putting seven past the Germans – a result that cost Schalke coach Domenico Tedesco his job.

Liverpool were frustrated in a goalless first leg against Bayern Munich at Anfield. But Bayern were comprehensively outplayed back in Munich, with Sadio Mane outwitting keeper Manuel Neuer to score a spectacular opening goal. Virgil Van Dijk headed a second from a corner before Mane added a late third. Bayern were disappointing, with their goal in Munich deflected in by Liverpool defender Joel Matip.

Barcelona were held to a goalless draw by Lyon in their first leg in France and were fortunate to take the lead in the return leg when Luis Suarez fell after treading on defender Jason Denayer, Messi converting the penalty with a nonchalant "Panenka".

Lyon briefly threatened after Lucas Tousart's second-half goal, but Messi responded with yet another virtuoso performance, scoring a second goal and two assists as Barcelona ran out 5-1 winners.

Porto came through a tight encounter with Roma, which went to extra time in Portugal after Moussa Marega had brought the aggregate scores level at 3-3. Roma were angry at the VAR decisions, with Porto awarded a late penalty when Alessandro Florenzi was penalised for dragging Fernando back as the ball was fizzed across the goal.

Alex Telles converted from the spot in the 117th minute, but a trip on sub Patrik Schick was ignored by officials. WS

Controversial... Marcus Rashford scores a late penalty in Paris

Internationals

WINDWARD ISLANDS TOURNAMENT

(Barbados were a guest team)

Played in Kingstown, St Vincent

Feb 28
Grenada 1 (Mark 17)
St Lucia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gaymes (SVG)

Feb 28
St Vincent & The Grenadines 2 (Stewart pen 32, Cunningham 86)
Barbados 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Delsol (Dca)

Mar 2
Grenada 0
Dominica 1 (Frederick 43)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Martindale (Bar)

Mar 2
St Vincent & The Grenadines 2 (Johnny 72, Stewart 79)
St Lucia 1 (St Prix 49)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Radix (Grn)

Mar 4
St Lucia 1 (Richard 33)
Dominica 1 (Joseph 36)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Gaymes (SVG)

Mar 4
Barbados 3 (*awarded*[1])
Grenada 0
Ref: Delsol (Dca)
[1]*Game originally finished 0-0 but Grenada fielded an ineligible player*

Mar 6
St Lucia 0
Barbados 2 (Harte 1, Sargeant 45+3)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gaymes (SVG)

Mar 6
St Vincent & The Grenadines 2 (Cunningham 45, 90+3)
Dominica 1 (Thomas 64)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Martindale (Bar)

Mar 8
Dominica 0
Barbados 2 (Stewart 2, Harris 42)
HT: 0-2

Mar 8
St Vincent & The Grenadines 1 (Cunningham 63)
Grenada 1 (Hosten 89)
HT: 0-0

WINDWARD ISLANDS TOURNAMENT – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Vincent (C)	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Barbados	4	3	0	1	7	2	9
Dominica	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Grenada	4	1	1	2	2	5	4
St Lucia	4	0	1	3	2	6	1

FRIENDLIES

Saturday, February 16
Feb16 - Santiago de los Caballeros
Dominican Republic 1 (Nunez pen 85)
Guadeloupe 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Encarnacion (DoR)
Sent off: Pasbeau (Guadeloupe) 22

Thursday, February 21
Feb 21 - Belek, Turkey
Kazakhstan 1 (Celeadnic og 61)
Moldova 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 500. **Ref:** Lukjancukas (Lit)
Kazakhstan: Nepohodov (Shatskiy 46) - Shomko, Maliy, Miroshnichenko (Bystrov 46), Erlanov (Orynbassar 80), Tursynbay (Shadmanov 66), Nurgaliev (Tapalov 66), Fedin (Aslan 88), Pertsukh, Turysbek (Najaryan 80), Murtazayev (Omirtayev 46).
Moldova: Celeadnic (Railean 88) - Jardan, Posmac (A Macritchii 62), Graur, Turcan (V Macritchii 88), Antoniuc, Rozgoniuc, Anton (Taras 74), Ambros, Sandu (Platica 88), Milinceanu (Nicolaescu 62).

Saturday, February 23
Feb 23 - Philipsburg
Sint Maarten 1 (Essed 28)
Saint Barthelemy 1 (Maxor 29)
HT: 1-1

Wednesday, February 27
Feb 27 - Havana
Cuba 5 (Andreus 20, Hernandez 38, pen 45+1, Alvarez 82, Sanchez pen 90+6)
Bermuda 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Brea (Cub)

Sunday, March 3
Mar 3 - Villa Tunari
Bolivia 2 (R Vaca 39, Quijano og 59)
Nicaragua 2 (Torres og 27, Goufas 36)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Orozco (Bol)
Bolivia: Mustafa - Candia, Jusino, Torres, Bejarano, Castro, Galindo (Garcia 90+2), Jorge Rojas (L Vaca 33), R Vaca (Vargas 78), Cardozo (Arano 46), Castellon (Arabe 83).
Nicaragua: Lorente - Rosas, Quijano, Copete, Betancur (Hernandez 90), M Lopez, O Lopez (Gutierrez 90+3), Chavarria, Galeano (Perez 84), Punyed (Serapio 70), Goufas (Berger 63).

Wednesday, March 6
Mar 6 - Los Angeles, USA
Guatemala 1 (Moreira 80)
El Salvador 3 (Ceren 2, Rugamas 33, Tamacas 68)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Unkel (USA)
Guatemala: Jerez - Marquez, Guzman (B De Leon 46), Moreira, Morales, Macal (Cabrera 46), Pineda, Galindo (Mendez 70), Guerra (Martinez 46), Betancourth (Aguilar 78), Vargas (Norales 67).
El Salvador: Hernandez - Tamacas (Barahona 90+2), Dominguez, Mancia, Jimenez, Monterrosa, Orellana, Mayen, Ceren, Rugamas, Alas (Rivas 55).

Saturday, March 9
Mar 9 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 0
Bangladesh 1 (Rabiul 84)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, March 10
Mar10 - Pretoria, South Africa
Mozambique 1
Eswatini (Swaziland) 1

2019 UNDER-20 WORLD CUP

To be played in Poland

Draw & match schedule

Group A
Colombia, Poland, Senegal, Tahiti

May 23 Tahiti v Senegal (Lublin)
May 23 Poland v Colombia (Lodz)
May 26 Senegal v Colombia (Lublin)
May 26 Poland v Tahiti (Lodz)
May 29 Colombia v Tahiti (Lublin)
May 29 Senegal v Poland (Lodz)

Group B
Ecuador, Italy, Japan, Mexico

May 23 Mexico v Italy (Gdynia)
May 23 Japan v Ecuador (Bydgoszcz)
May 26 Mexico v Japan (Gdynia)
May 26 Ecuador v Italy (Bydgoszcz)
May 29 Ecuador v Mexico (Gdynia)
May 29 Italy v Japan (Bydgoszcz)

Group C
Honduras, New Zealand, Norway, Uruguay

May 24 Honduras v New Zealand (Lublin)
May 24 Uruguay v Norway (Lodz)
May 27 Honduras v Uruguay (Lublin)
May 27 Norway v New Zealand (Lodz)
May 30 New Zealand v Uruguay (Lodz)
May 30 Norway v Honduras (Lublin)

Group D
Nigeria, Qatar, Ukraine, United States

May 24 Qatar v Nigeria (Tychy)
May 24 Ukraine v United States (Bielsko-Biala)
May 27 Qatar v Ukraine (Tychy)
May 27 United States v Nigeria (Bielsko-Biala)
May 30 Nigeria v Ukraine (Bielsko-Biala)
May 30 United States v Qatar (Tychy)

Group E
France, Mali, Panama, Saudi Arabia

May 25 Panama v Mali (Bydgoszcz)
May 25 France v Saudi Arabia (Gdynia)
May 28 Panama v France (Bydgoszcz)
May 28 Saudi Arabia v Mali (Gdynia)
May 31 Mali v France (Gdynia)
May 31 Saudi Arabia v Panama (Bydgoszcz)

Group F
Argentina, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea

May 25 Portugal v South Korea (Bielsko-Biala)
May 25 Argentina v South Africa (Tychy)
May 28 Portugal v Argentina (Bielsko-Biala)
May 28 South Africa v South Korea (Tychy)
May 31 South Korea v Argentina (Tychy)
May 31 South Africa v Portugal (Bielsko-Biala)

● *Top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed teams with best record qualify for round of16*

Round of 16
Jun 2 Gp B 1st v Gp A/C/D 3rd (Gdynia) (RS1)
Jun 2 Gp A 2nd v Gp C 2nd (Lodz) (RS2)
Jun 3 Gp C 1st v Gp A/B/F 3rd (Lublin) (RS3)
Jun 3 Gp D 1st v Gp B/E/F 3rd (Tychy) (RS4)
Jun 3 Gp A 1st v Gp C/D/E 3rd (Lodz) (RS5)
Jun 4 Gp B 2nd v Gp F 2nd (Lublin) (RS6)
Jun 4 Gp E 1st v Gp D 2nd (Bydgoszcz) (RS7)
Jun 4 Gp F 1st v Gp E 2nd (Bielsko-Biala) (RS8)

Quarter-finals
Jun 7 RS2 winner v RS4 winner (Lodz) (QF1)
Jun 7 RS1 winner v RS8 winner (Tychy) (QF2)
Jun 8 RS7 winner v RS3 winner (Gdynia) (QF3)
Jun 8 RS6 winner v RS5 winner (B-Biala) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jun 11 QF1 winner v QF2 winner (Gdynia)
Jun 11 QF3 winner v QF4 winner (Lublin)

3rd-place match
Jun 14 (Gdynia)

Final
Jun 15 (Lodz)

2019 COPA AMERICA

To be played in Brazil

Draw & match schedule

(Japan & Qatar are guest teams)

Group A
Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Venezuela

Jun 14 Brazil v Bolivia (Sao Paulo)
Jun 15 Venezuela v Peru (Porto Alegre)
Jun 18 Bolivia v Peru (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 18 Brazil v Venezuela (Salvador)
Jun 22 Bolivia v Venezuela (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 22 Peru v Brazil (Sao Paulo)

Group B
Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Qatar

Jun 15 Argentina v Colombia (Salvador)
Jun 16 Paraguay v Qatar (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 19 Colombia v Qatar (Sao Paulo)
Jun 19 Argentina v Paraguay (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 23 Qatar v Argentina (Porto Alegre)
Jun 23 Colombia v Paraguay (Salvador)

Group C
Chile, Ecuador, Japan, Uruguay

Jun 16 Uruguay v Ecuador (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 17 Japan v Chile (Sao Paulo)
Jun 20 Uruguay v Japan (Porto Alegre)
Jun 21 Ecuador v Chile (Salvador)
Jun 24 Ecuador v Japan (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 24 Chile v Uruguay (Rio de Janeiro)

● *Top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with best record qualify for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jun 27 Gp A 1st v Gp B/C 3rd (Porto Alegre) (QF1)
Jun 28 Gp A 2nd v Gp B 2nd (R Janeiro) (QF2)
Jun 28 Gp B 1st v Gp C 2nd (Sao Paulo) (QF3)
Jun 29 Gp C 1st v Gp A/B 3rd (Salvador) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jul 2 QF1 winner v QF2 winner (Belo Horizonte)
Jul 3 QF3 winner v QF4 winner (Porto Alegre)

3rd-place match
Jul 6 (Sao Paulo)

Final
Jul 7 (Rio de Janeiro)

2019 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

To be played in France

Draw & match schedule

Group A
France, Nigeria, Norway, South Korea

Jun 7 France v South Korea (Paris)
Jun 8 Norway v Nigeria (Reims)
Jun 12 Nigeria v South Korea (Grenoble)
Jun 12 France v Norway (Nice)
Jun 17 Nigeria v France (Rennes)
Jun 17 South Korea v Norway (Reims)

Group B
China, Germany, South Africa, Spain

Jun 8 Germany v China (Rennes)
Jun 8 Spain v South Africa (Le Havre)
Jun 12 Germany v Spain (Valenciennes)
Jun 13 South Africa v China (Paris)
Jun 17 China v Spain (Le Havre)
Jun 17 South Africa v Germany (Montpellier)

Group C
Australia, Brazil, Italy, Jamaica

Jun 9 Australia v Italy (Valenciennes)
Jun 9 Brazil v Jamaica (Grenoble)
Jun 13 Australia v Brazil (Montpellier)
Jun 14 Jamaica v Italy (Reims)
Jun 18 Jamaica v Australia (Grenoble)
Jun 18 Italy v Brazil (Valenciennes)

Group D
Argentina, England, Japan, Scotland

Jun 9 England v Scotland (Nice)
Jun 10 Argentina v Japan (Paris)
Jun 14 Japan v Scotland (Rennes)
Jun 14 England v Argentina (Le Havre)
Jun 19 Japan v England (Nice)
Jun 19 Scotland v Argentina (Paris)

Group E
Cameroon, Canada, Holland, New Zealand

Jun 10 Canada v Cameroon (Montpellier)
Jun 11 New Zealand v Holland (Le Havre)
Jun 15 Holland v Cameroon (Valenciennes)
Jun 15 Canada v New Zealand (Grenoble)
Jun 20 Cameroon v New Zealand (Montpellier)
Jun 20 Holland v Canada (Reims)

Group F
Chile, Sweden, Thailand, United States

Jun 11 Chile v Sweden (Rennes)
Jun 11 United States v Thailand (Reims)
Jun 16 Sweden v Thailand (Nice)
Jun 16 United States v Chile (Paris)
Jun 20 Sweden v United States (Le Havre)
Jun 20 Thailand v Chile (Rennes)

● *Top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed teams with best record qualify for round of16*

Round of 16
Jun 22 Gp B 1st v Gp A/C/D 3rd (Grenoble) (RS1)
Jun 22 Gp A 2nd v Gp C 2nd (Nice) (RS2)
Jun 23 Gp D 1st v Gp B/E/F 3rd (Valenc's) (RS3)
Jun 23 Gp A 1st v Gp C/D/E 3rd (Le Havre) (RS4)
Jun 24 Gp B 2nd v Gp F 1st (Reims) (RS5)
Jun 24 Gp F 2nd v Gp E 2nd (Paris) (RS6)
Jun 25 Gp C 1st v Gp A/B/F 3rd (Montp'er) (RS7)
Jun 25 Gp E 1st v Gp D 2nd (Rennes) (RS8)

Quarter-finals
Jun 27 RS2 winner v RS3 winner (Le Havre) (QF1)
Jun 28 RS4 winner v RS5 winner (Paris) (QF2)
Jun 29 RS7 winner v RS8 winner (Valenc's) (QF3)
Jun 29 RS1 winner v RS6 winner (Rennes) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jul 2 QF1 winner v QF2 winner (Lyon)
Jul 3 QF3 winner v QF4 winner (Lyon)

3rd-place match
Jul 6 (Nice)

Final
Jul 7 (Lyon)

Club football

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round
(single-leg ties)
Feb 5: Al Wehdat (Jor) 2 Al Kuwait (Kuw) 3; Ceres-Negros (Phi) 1 Yangon United (Mym) 2; Home United (Sin) 1 Persija (Ins) 3.

2nd qualifying round
(single-leg ties)
Feb 12: AGMK (Uzb) 4 Istiklol (Taj) 2; Bangkok United (Tha) 0 Ha Noi (Vie) 1; Chiangrai United (Tha) 3 Yangon United 1; Newcastle Jets (Aus) 3 Persija 1 (aet); Pakhtakor (Uzb) 2 Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 1; Perak (Mly) 1 Kitchee (HK) 1 (aet, Perak 6-5 on pens); Saipa (Irn) 4 Minerva Punjab (Ind) 0; Zob Ahan (Irn) 1 Al Kuwait 0 (aet).

Final qualifying round
(single-leg ties)
Feb 19: Al Gharafa (Qat) 2 Zob Ahan 3; Al Nasr (UAE) 1 Pakhtakor 2; Al Nassr (Sau) 4 AGMK 0; Al Rayyan (Qat) 3 Saipa 1; Kashima Antlers (Jap) 4 Newcastle Jets 1; Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap) 0 Chiangrai United 0 (aet, Sanfrecce Hiroshima 4-3 on pens); Shandong Luneng (Chn) 4 Ha Noi 1; Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) 5 Perak 1.

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage*

PALESTINE (Gaza)

2018-19 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
K'mat Rafah (C)	22	16	3	3	40	16	51
Shabab Jabalia	22	10	6	6	26	20	36
Al Ittihad KY	22	10	6	6	21	20	36
Shabab KY	22	10	5	7	29	21	35
Shabab Rafah	22	9	7	6	30	27	34
Al Ittihad Sh'a	22	9	4	9	35	25	31
Al Hilal Gaza	22	8	5	9	20	27	29
K'mat Shatea	22	7	6	9	30	26	27
Al Sadaqa	22	6	8	8	16	19	26
Gaza SC	22	6	6	10	18	28	24
Ahli Beit H (R)	22	6	3	13	25	34	21
K'mat KY (R)	22	3	5	14	16	43	14

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round
1st legs - Feb19-21; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28
Alianza (ESv) v Monterrey (Mex)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Atletico Pantoja (DoR) v New York Red Bulls (USA)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Guastatoya (Gtm) v Houston Dynamo (USA)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Herediano (CR) v Atlanta United (USA)
3-1, 0-4 (agg 3-5)
Independiente (Pan) v Toronto (Can)
4-0, 1-1 (agg 5-1)
Marathon (Hnd) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
2-6, 0-5 (agg 2-11)
Saprissa (CR) v Tigres UANL (Mex)
1-0, 1-5 (agg 2-5)
Sporting Kansas City (USA) v Toluca (Mex)
3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)

US VIRGIN ISLANDS

2018-19 Championship Final
Feb 17: Helenites 2 United We Stand 1.

EUROPE

EUROPA LEAGUE

Round of 32
1st legs - Feb12/14; 2nd legs - Feb 20/21
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Arsenal (Eng)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Celtic (Sco) v Valencia (Spa)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Club Brugge (Blg) v Salzburg (Aut)
2-1, 0-4 (agg 2-5)
Fenerbahce (Tur) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Galatasaray (Tur) v Benfica (Por)
1-2, 0-0 (agg 1-2)
Krasnodar (Rus) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Krasnodar on away goals)
Lazio (Ita) v Sevilla (Spa)
0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Malmo (Swe) v Chelsea (Eng)
1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5)
Olympiakos (Gre) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
2-2, 0-1 (agg 2-3)
Rapid Vienna (Aut) v Internazionale (Ita)
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)
Rennes (Fra) v Real Betis (Spa)
3-3, 3-1 (agg 6-4)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
2-2, 1-4 (agg 3-6)
Slavia Prague (CzR) v Genk (Blg)
0-0, 4-1 (agg 4-1)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Villarreal (Spa)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Viktoria Plzen (CzR) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4)
Zurich (Swi) v Napoli (Ita)
1-3, 0-2 (agg 1-5)

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A
Played in Kone, New Caledonia
Feb 10: Toti City (PNG) 3 Tefana (Tah) 3; Malampa Revivors (Van) 0 Hienghene Sport (NwC) 5.
Feb 13: Malampa Revivors 2 Toti City 4; Hienghene Sport 1 Tefana 0.
Feb 16: Tefana 3 Malampa Revivors 3; Hienghene Sport 1 Toti City 1.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hienghene (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Toti City (Q)	3	1	2	0	8	6	5
Tefana	3	0	2	1	6	7	2
Malampa Rev	3	0	1	2	5	12	1

Group B
Played in Lautoka, Fiji
Feb 10: Central Sport (Tah) 3 Henderson Eels (Sol) 2; Morobe Wawens (PNG) 0 Lautoka (Fij) 5.
Feb 13: Morobe Wawens 0 Central Sport 7; Lautoka 5 Henderson Eels 6.
Feb 16: Henderson Eels 7 Morobe Wawens 0; Lautoka 2 Central Sport 2.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Central Sp (Q)	3	2	1	0	12	4	7
Henderson (Q)	3	2	0	1	15	8	6
Lautoka	3	1	1	1	12	8	4
Morobe W'ns	3	0	0	3	0	19	0

Group C
Played in Port Vila, Vanuatu
Feb 23: Team Wellington (NZ) 2 Ba (Fij) 0; Kiwi (Soa) 0 Erakor Golden Star (Van) 2.
Feb 26: Kiwi 0 Team Wellington 13; Erakor Golden Star 1 Ba 1.
Mar 1: Ba 5 Kiwi 1; Erakor Golden Star 0 Team Wellington 3.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
T Well'ton (Q)	3	3	0	0	18	0	9
Ba (Q)	3	1	1	1	6	4	4
Erakor GS	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Kiwi	3	0	0	3	1	20	0

Group D
Played in Honiara, Solomon Islands
Feb 24: Auckland City (NZ) 2 Magenta (NwC) 1; Tupapa Maraerenga (Coo) 1 Solomon Warriors (Sol) 10.
Feb 27: Tupapa Maraerenga 0 Auckland City 15; Solomon Warriors 0 Magenta 3.
Mar 2: Magenta 10 Tupapa Maraerenga 1; Solomon Warriors 0 Auckland City 6.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland C (Q)	3	3	0	0	23	1	9
Magenta (Q)	3	2	0	1	14	3	6
Sol Warriors	3	1	0	2	10	10	3
Tupapa M'ga	3	0	0	3	2	35	0

● *The top 2 in each group qualified for the quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals draw
Auckland City v Toti City
Central Sport v Magenta
Hienghene Sport v Ba
Team Wellington v Henderson Eels
Single-leg ties, to be played Apr 6/7

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st qualifying round
1st legs -Jan 22/23; 2nd legs -Jan 29/30
Bolivar (Bol) v Defensor Sporting (Uru)
2-4, 3-2 (agg 5-6)
Delfin (Ecu) v Nacional (Par)
3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1)
Deportivo La Guaira (Ven) v Real Garcilaso (Per)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Deportivo La Guaira on away goals)

2nd qualifying round
1st legs - Feb 5-7; 2nd legs - Feb12-14
Danubio (Uru) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
2-2, 2-3 (agg 4-5)
Defensor Sporting v Barcelona (Ecu)
3-0 (*awarded*[1]), 0-1 (agg 3-1)
Delfin v Caracas (Ven)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Caracas on away goals)
Deportivo La Guaira v Atletico Nacional (Col)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Melgar (Per) v Universidad de Chile (Chl)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Palestino (Chl) v Independiente Medellin (Col)
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Palestino 4-1 on pens)
Talleres (Arg) v Sao Paulo (Bra)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
The Strongest (Bol) v Libertad (Par)
1-1, 1-5 (agg 2-6)
[1]The game was originally won 2-1 by Barcelona but they fielded an ineligible player

Final qualifying round
1st legs - Feb19-21; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28
Defensor Sporting v Atletico Mineiro
0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)
Libertad v Atletico Nacional
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Libertad 5-4 on pens)
Melgar v Caracas
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Talleres v Palestino
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage; the 2 losing teams with the best performance in the final qualifying round (Atletico Nacional & Caracas) enter the Sudamericana Cup at the 2nd round stage*

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA FEBRUARY 2019

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11
SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	14
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	12
ALISSON (Liverpool)	11
EDERSON (Manchester City)	9
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	7
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	5
Thibaut COURTOIS (Real Madrid)	4
Gianluigi DONNARUMMA (Milan)	3
Salvatore SIRIGU (Torino)	2
Roman BURKI (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Petr CECH (Arsenal)	1
Ralf FAHRMANN (Schalke)	1
Hugo LLORIS (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Mike MAIGNAN (Lille)	1
Jordi MASIP (Real Valladolid)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Oier OLAZABAL (Levante)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	1
Jordan PICKFORD (Everton)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil VAN DIJK (Liverpool)	39
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	19
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	16
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	15
Ashraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)	13
ALEX SANDRO (Juventus)	12
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	12
Joao CANCELO (Juventus)	11
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	11
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	8
Aymeric LAPORTE (Manchester City)	8
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	8
Jose GIMENEZ (Atletico Madrid)	7
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	7
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Andrew ROBERTSON (Liverpool)	7
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	5
Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool)	4
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	4
Juan BERNAT (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	4
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Manuel AKANJI (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Santiago ARIAS (Atletico Madrid)	3
DAVID LUIZ (Chelsea)	3
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	3
Matthijs DE LIGT (Ajax)	2
Nico ELVEDI (Borussia Monchengladbach)	2
Joe GOMEZ (Liverpool)	2
Lucas HERNANDEZ (Atletico Madrid)	2
Thilo KEHRER (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Vincent KOMPANY (Manchester City)	2
Victor LINDELOF (Manchester United)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Willy ORBAN (RB Leipzig)	2
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	2
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	2
Alessio ROMAGNOLI (Milan)	2
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	2
Jan VERTONGHEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	1
Daley BLIND (Ajax)	1
Dani CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Danny DA COSTA (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Abdou DIALO (Borussia Dortmund)	1
FILIPE LUIS (Atletico Madrid)	1
Junior FIRPO (Real Betis)	1
Matthias GINTER (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
Makoto HASEBE (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	1
Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	1
Kenny LALA (Strasbourg)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
MARCELO (Lyon)	1
Benjamin MENDY (Manchester City)	1
Ferland MENDY (Lyon)	1
EDER MILITAO (Porto)	1
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Arsenal)	1
Benjamin PAVARD (Stuttgart)	1
Daniele RUGANI (Juventus)	1
Nico SCHULZ (Hoffenheim)	1
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO (Ajax)	1
Alex TELLES (Porto)	1
Omer TOPRAK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Hamari TRAORE (Rennes)	1
Kieran TRIPPIER (Tottenham Hotspur)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	23
Paul POGBA (Manchester United)	23
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	17
David SILVA (Manchester City)	12
Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund)	11
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	10
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	8
Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	8
Leon GORETZKA (Bayern Munich)	7
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	6
Bernardo SILVA (Manchester City)	6
Philippe COUTINHO (Barcelona)	5
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
JORGINHO (Chelsea)	5
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	5
Thorgan HAZARD (Borussia M'gladbach)	4
ARTHUR (Barcelona)	3
Julian BRANDT (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Bruno FERNANDES (Sporting)	3
Nicolas PEPE (Lille)	3
Pablo SARABIA (Sevilla)	3
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nicolo ZANIOLO (Roma)	3
Rodrigo BETANCUR (Juventus)	2
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	2
Thomas DELANEY (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Mancheser City)	2
ISCO (Real Madrid)	2
Blaise MATUIDI (Juventus)	2
James MILNER (Liverpool)	2
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	2
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	2
SAUL Niguez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Cengiz UNDER (Roma)	2
Ever BANEGA (Sevilla)	1
Ross BARKLEY (Chelsea)	1
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	1
Memphis DEPAY (Lyon)	1
Javairo DILROSUN (Hertha Berlin)	1
Julian DRAXLER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Ondrej DUDA (Hertha Berlin)	1
FABINHO (Liverpool)	1
Andre GOMES (Everton)	1
Hector HERRERA (Porto)	1
Franck KESSIE (Milan)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Thomas LEMAR (Atletico Madrid)	1
Giovani LO CELSO (Real Betis)	1
Riyad MAHREZ (Manchester City)	1
Javi MARTINEZ (Bayern Munich)	1
Gelson MARTINS (Monaco)	1
Jaime MATA (Getafe)	1
Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC (Lazio)	1
Joao MOUTINHO (Wolves)	1
Jesus NAVAS (Sevilla)	1
Thomas PARTEY (Atletico Madrid)	1
PIZZI (Benfica)	1
Matteo POLITANO (Internazionale)	1
RODRI (Valencia)	1
Lucas TORREIRA (Arsenal)	1
Oliver TORRES (Porto)	1
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	1
WILLIAN (Chelsea)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	49
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	23
Cristiano RONALDO (Juventus)	22
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	15
Krzysztof PIATEK (Genoa/Milan)	15
Paco ALCACER (Borussia Dortmund)	11
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	11
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	9
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Andre SILVA (Sevilla)	8
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	7
Duvan ZAPATA (Atalanta)	7
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Arsenal)	6
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	6
Luka JOVIC (Eintracht Frankfurt)	5
Fabio QUAGLIARELLA (Sampdoria)	5
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotrspur)	4
Hakim ZIYECH (Ajax)	4
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Ousmane DEMBELE (Barcelona)	3
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	3
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	2
Roberto FIRMINO (Liverpool)	2
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	2
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	2
Marcus RASHFORD (Manchester United)	2
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	1
Sebastien HALLER (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Gonzalo HIGUAIN (Chelsea)	1
Borja IGLESIAS (Espanyol)	1
Sadio MANE (Liverpool)	1
Cristhian STUANI (Girona)	1

MLS 2019

ATLANTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Brad **GUZAN**	(34) 09.09.84
25	Alec **KANN**	(28) 08.08.90
13	Brendan **MOORE**	(26) 16.04.92

DEFENDERS

22	Mikey **AMBROSE**	(25) 05.10.93
21	George **BELLO**	(17) 22.01.02
2	Franco **ESCOBAR** (Arg)	(24) 21.02.95
5	Leandro **GONZALEZ PIREZ** (Arg)	(27) 26.02.92
3	Michael **PARKHURST**	(35) 24.01.84
4	Florentin **POGBA** (Fra)	(28) 19.08.90
12	Miles **ROBINSON**	(22) 14.03.97

MIDFIELDERS

8	Ezequiel **BARCO** (Arg)	(19) 23.03.99
30	Andrew **CARLETON**	(18) 22.06.00
27	Chris **GOSLIN**	(18) 12.05.00
24	Julian **GRESSEL** (Ger)	(25) 16.12.93
32	Kevin **KRATZ** (Ger)	(32) 21.01.87
18	Jeff **LARENTOWICZ**	(35) 05.08.83
10	Gonzalo **MARTINEZ**	(25) 13.06.93
6	Darlington **NAGBE**	(28) 19.07.90
11	Eric **REMEDI** (Arg)	(23) 04.06.95
20	Brek **SHEA**	(29) 28.02.90

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23	Lagos **KUNGA**	(20) 20.10.98
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28	Dion **PEREIRA** (Eng)	(19) 25.03.99
19	Brandon **VAZQUEZ**	(20) 14.10.98
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33	Gordon **WILD** (Ger)	(23) 16.10.95
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COACH

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CHICAGO FIRE

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1	David **OUSTED** (Den)	(34) 01.02.85
45	Richard **SANCHEZ** (Mex)	(24) 05.05.94

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4	Johan **KAPPELHOF** (Hol)	(28) 05.08.90
15	Grant **LILLARD**	(23) 05.12.95
2	**MARCELO** (Bra)	(29) 27.07.89
36	Andre **REYNOLDS**	(17) 02.05.01

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13	Brandt **BRONICO**	(23) 20.06.95
28	Elliot **COLLIER** (NZ)	(24) 22.02.95
7	Raheem **EDWARDS** (Can)	(23) 17.07.95
11	Przemyslaw **FRANKOWSKI** (Pol)	(23) 12.04.95
33	Jeremiah **GUTJAHR**	(21) 10.08.97
22	Nicolas **HASLER** (Lie)	(27) 04.05.91
21	Fabian **HERBERS** (Ger)	(25) 17.08.93
10	Aleksandar **KATAI** (Ser)	(28) 06.02.91
18	Cristian **MARTINEZ** (Pan)	(22) 06.02.97
6	Dax **McCARTY**	(31) 30.04.87
14	Djordje **MIHAILOVIC**	(20) 10.11.98
31	Bastian **SCHWEINSTEIGER** (Ger)	(34) 01.08.84

FORWARDS

17	Diego **CAMPOS** (CR)	(23) 01.10.95
20	Amando **MORENO**	(23) 10.09.95
23	Nemanja **NIKOLIC** (Hun)	(31) 31.12.87
9	CJ **SAPONG**	(30) 27.12.88

COACH

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CINCINNATI

GOALKEEPERS

13	James **HAGUE**	(22) 28.08.96
18	Spencer **RICHEY**	(26) 30.05.92
22	Przemyslaw **TYTON** (Pol)	(32) 04.01.87

DEFENDERS

17	Mathieu **DEPLAGNE** (Fra)	(27) 01.10.91
4	Greg **GARZA**	(27) 16.08.91
14	Nick **HAGGLUND**	(26) 14.09.92
32	Justin **HOYTE** (T&T)	(34) 20.11.84
3	Forrest **LASSO**	(25) 11.05.93
47	Hassan **NDAM** (Cam)	(20) 09.10.98
92	Alvas **POWELL** (Jam)	(24) 18.07.94
23	Blake **SMITH**	(28) 17.01.91
2	Kendall **WASTON** (CR)	(31) 01.01.88

MIDFIELDERS

27	Fatai **ALASHE**	(25) 21.10.93
5	Nazmi **ALBADAWI** (Pal)	(27) 24.08.91
16	Eric **ALEXANDER**	(30) 14.04.88
24	Frankie **AMAYA**	(18) 26.09.00
6	Leonardo **BERTONE** (Swi)	(25) 14.03.94
19	Corben **BONE**	(30) 16.09.88
15	Allan **CRUZ** (CR)	(22) 24.02.96
7	Roland **LAMAH** (Blg)	(31) 31.12.87
20	Jimmy **McLAUGHLIN**	(25) 30.04.93
33	Caleb **STANKO**	(25) 26.07.93
8	Victor **ULLOA** (Mex)	(27) 04.03.92

FORWARDS

9	Fanendo **ADI** (Nga)	(29) 10.10.90
81	Rashawn **DALLY**	(22) 14.01.97
45	Emmanuel **LEDESMA** (Arg)	(30) 24.05.88
31	Kekuta **MANNEH** (Gam)	(24) 30.12.94
11	Darren **MATTOCKS** (Jam)	(28) 02.09.90
10	Emery **WELSHMAN** (Guy)	(27) 09.11.91

COACH

Alan **KOCH** (SAf)		(43) 30.04.75

COLORADO RAPIDS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Tim **HOWARD**	(40) 06.03.79
31	Clint **IRWIN**	(29) 01.04.89
15	Andre **RAWLS**	(27) 20.12.91

DEFENDERS

24	Kortne **FORD**	(23) 26.01.96
3	Kofi **OPARE** (Gha)	(28) 12.10.90
18	Sam **RABEN**	(21) 11.05.97
2	Keegan **ROSENBERRY**	(25) 11.12.93
44	Axel **SJOBERG** (Swe)	(28) 08.03.91
5	Tommy **SMITH** (NZ)	(28) 31.03.90
13	Sam **VINES**	(19) 31.05.99
4	Danny **WILSON** (Sco)	(27) 27.12.91
27	Deklan **WYNNE** (NZ)	(24) 20.03.95

MIDFIELDERS

10	Kellyn **ACOSTA**	(23) 24.07.95
21	Nana **ADJEI-BOATENG** (Gha)	(24) 10.05.94
26	Cole **BASSETT**	(17) 28.07.01
8	Johan **BLOMBERG** (Swe)	(31) 14.06.87
6	Benny **FEILHABER**	(34) 19.01.85
20	Nicolas **MEZQUIDA** (Uru)	(27) 21.01.92
28	Sam **NICHOLSON** (Sco)	(24) 20.01.95
19	Jack **PRICE** (Eng)	(26) 19.12.92
17	Dillon **SERNA**	(24) 25.03.94

FORWARDS

11	Shkelzen **GASHI** (Alb)	(30) 15.07.88
29	Matt **HUNDLEY**	(18) 11.05.00
12	Niki **JACKSON**	(23) 25.08.95
23	Kei **KAMARA** (SLe)	(34) 01.09.84
7	Diego **RUBIO** (Chl)	(25) 15.05.93
99	Andre **SHINYASHIKI** (Bra)	(23) 11.06.95

COACH

Anthony **HUDSON**		(38) 11.03.81

COLUMBUS CREW

GOALKEEPERS

1	Joe **BENDIK**	(29) 25.04.89
24	Jon **KEMPIN**	(25) 08.04.93
12	Ben **LUNDGAARD**	(23) 02.09.95
23	Zack **STEFFEN**	(23) 02.04.95

DEFENDERS

17	Lalas **ABUBAKAR** (Gha)	(24) 25.12.94
25	Harrison **AFFUL** (Gha)	(32) 24.07.86
21	Alex **CROGNALE**	(24) 27.08.94
14	Waylon **FRANCIS** (CR)	(28) 20.09.90
31	Connor **MALONEY**	(23) 18.05.95
4	Jonathan **MENSAH** (Gha)	(28) 13.07.90
22	Gaston **SAURO** (Arg)	(29) 23.02.90
19	Milton **VALENZUELA** (Arg)	(20) 13.08.98
3	Josh **WILLIAMS**	(30) 18.04.88

MIDFIELDERS

2	Luis **ARGUDO**	(23) 13.12.95
8	**ARTUR** (Bra)	(23) 11.03.96
13	Ricardo **CLARK**	(36) 10.02.83
28	Niko **HANSEN** (Den)	(24) 14.09.94
10	Federico **HIGUAIN** (Arg)	(34) 25.10.84
16	Hector **JIMENEZ**	(30) 03.11.88
30	Aboubacar **KEITA**	(18) 06.04.00
9	Justin **MERAM** (Irq)	(30) 04.12.88
27	Edward **OPOKU** (Gha)	(22) 01.08.96
20	Eduardo **SOSA** (Ven)	(22) 20.06.96
6	Wil **TRAPP**	(26) 15.01.93
33	JJ **WILLIAMS**	(21) 04.01.98

FORWARDS

32	Patrick **MULLINS**	(27) 05.02.92
18	**ROBINHO** (Bra)	(24) 19.01.95
7	Pedro **SANTOS** (Por)	(30) 22.04.88
11	Gyasi **ZARDES**	(27) 02.09.91

COACH

Caleb **PORTER**		(44) 18.02.75

DC UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

36	Earl **EDWARDS JR**	(27) 24.01.92
24	Bill **HAMID**	(28) 25.11.90
1	Chris **SEITZ**	(32) 12.03.87

DEFENDERS

15	Steve **BIRNBAUM**	(28) 23.01.91
13	Frederic **BRILLANT** (Fra)	(33) 26.06.85
21	Chris **DURKIN**	(19) 08.02.00
28	Joseph **MORA** (CR)	(26) 15.01.93
3	Chris **ODOI-ATSEM**	(23) 28.05.95
23	Donovan **PINES**	(21) 07.03.98
20	Jalen **ROBINSON**	(24) 08.05.94
30	Akeem **WARD**	(23) 06.01.96

MIDFIELDERS

10	Luciano **ACOSTA** (Arg)	(24) 31.05.94
4	Russell **CANOUSE**	(23) 11.06.95
91	Oniel **FISHER** (Jam)	(27) 22.11.91
29	Leonardo **JARA** (Arg)	(27) 20.05.91
16	Chris **McCANN** (Rol)	(31) 21.07.87
5	Junior **MORENO** (Ven)	(25) 20.07.93
11	Lucas **RODRIGUEZ** (Arg)	(21) 27.04.97
8	Ulises **SEGURA** (CR)	(24) 23.06.93
18	Zoltan **STIEBER** (Hun)	(30) 16.10.88

FORWARDS

25	Quincy **AMARIKWA**	(31) 29.10.87
7	Paul **ARRIOLA**	(24) 05.02.95
26	Antonio **BUSTAMANTE**	(21) 20.06.97
9	Wayne **ROONEY** (Eng)	(33) 24.10.85

COACH

Ben **OLSEN**		(41) 03.05.77

DALLAS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jesse **GONZALEZ**	(23) 25.05.95
14	Jimmy **MAURER**	(30) 14.10.88
30	Kyle **ZOBECK**	(29) 06.02.90

DEFENDERS

4	**BRESSAN** (Bra)	(26) 15.01.93
2	Reggie **CANNON**	(20) 11.06.98
24	Matt **HEDGES**	(28) 01.04.90
5	Moises **HERNANDEZ** (Gtm)	(27) 05.03.92
25	Callum **MONTGOMERY**	(21) 14.05.97
26	John **NELSON**	(20) 11.07.98
6	Marquinhos **PEDROSO** (Bra)	(25) 04.10.93
3	Reto **ZIEGLER** (Swi)	(33) 16.01.86

MIDFIELDERS

8	Bryan **ACOSTA** (Hon)	(25) 24.11.93
10	Pablo **ARANGUIZ** (Chl)	(22) 17.03.97
21	Michael **BARRIOS** (Col)	(27) 21.04.91
33	Edwin **CERRILLO**	(18) 03.10.00
7	Carlos **GRUEZO** (Ecu)	(23) 19.04.95
15	Jacori **HAYES**	(23) 29.06.95
12	Ryan **HOLLINGSHEAD**	(27) 16.04.91
11	Santiago **MOSQUERA** (Col)	(24) 07.02.95
19	Paxton **POMYKAL**	(19) 17.12.99
23	Thomas **ROBERTS**	(17) 11.05.01
18	Brandon **SERVANIA**	(20) 12.03.99

FORWARDS

17	Francis **ATUAHENE** (Gha)	(22) 08.06.96
16	Dominique **BADJI** (Sen)	(26) 16.10.92
9	Cristian **COLMAN** (Par)	(25) 26.02.94
27	Jesus **FERREIRA** (Col)	(18) 24.12.00
13	Zdenek **ONDRASEK** (CzR)	(30) 22.12.88
29	Bryan **REYNOLDS**	(17) 28.06.01
22	Ema **TWUMASI** (Gha)	(21) 18.05.97

COACH

Luis **GONZALEZ**		(38) 14.07.80

HOUSTON DYNAMO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Tyler **DERIC**	(30) 30.08.88
26	Michael **NELSON**	(24) 10.02.95
23	Joe **WILLIS**	(30) 10.08.88

DEFENDERS

7	DaMarcus **BEASLEY**	(36) 24.05.82
20	AJ **DeLaGARZA** (Gum)	(31) 04.11.87
12	Chris **DUVALL**	(27) 10.09.91
15	Maynor **FIGUEROA** (Hon)	(35) 02.05.83
2	Alejandro **FUENMAYOR** (Ven)	(22) 29.08.96
16	Kevin **GARCIA**	(28) 21.08.90
14	Marlon **HAIRSTON**	(24) 23.03.94
3	Adam **LUNDKVIST** (Swe)	(24) 20.03.94
28	Erik **McCUE**	(18) 18.01.01
6	Aljaz **STRUNA** (Sln)	(28) 04.08.90

MIDFIELDERS

25	Eric **BIRD**	(25) 08.04.93
5	Juan David **CABEZAS** (Col)	(28) 27.02.91
24	Darwin **CEREN** (EIS)	(29) 31.12.89
27	Oscar Boniek **GARCIA** (Hon)	(34) 04.09.84
29	Samuel **JUNQUA**	(22) 09.11.96
10	Tomas **MARTINEZ** (Arg)	(24) 07.03.95
11	Tommy **McNAMARA**	(28) 06.02.91
8	Memo **RODRIGUEZ**	(23) 27.12.95
22	Matias **VERA** (Arg)	(23) 26.10.95

FORWARDS

17	Alberth **ELIS** (Hon)	(23) 12.02.96
9	Mauro **MANOTAS** (Col)	(23) 15.07.95
21	Ronaldo **PENA** (Ven)	(22) 10.03.97
31	Romell **QUIOTO** (Hon)	(27) 09.08.91

COACH

Wilmer **CABRERA** (Col)		(51) 15.09.67

MLS 2019

LA GALAXY

GOALKEEPERS

1	David **BINGHAM**	(29) 19.10.89
28	Matt **LAMPSON**	(29) 06.09.89
41	Justin **VOM STEEG**	(21) 05.04.97

DEFENDERS

22	Julian **ARAUJO**	(17) 13.08.01
21	Hugo **ARELLANO**	(21) 05.03.98
25	Rolf **FELTSCHER** (Ven)	(28) 06.10.90
20	Tomas **HILLIARD-ARCE**	(23) 02.11.95
3	Diego **POLENTA** (Uru)	(27) 06.02.92
4	David **ROMNEY**	(25) 12.06.93
16	Jorgen **SKJELVIK** (Nor)	(27) 05.07.91
5	Daniel **STERES**	(28) 11.11.90

MIDFIELDERS

7	Romain **ALESSANDRINI** (Fra)	(29) 03.04.89
26	Efrain **ALVAREZ** (Mex)	(16) 19.06.02
24	Emmanuel **BOATENG** (Gha)	(25) 17.01.94
14	Servando **CARRASCO**	(30) 13.08.88
27	Emil **CUELLO**	(22) 02.01.97
8	Jonathan **DOS SANTOS** (Mex)	(28) 26.04.90
19	**JUNINHO** (Bra)	(30) 08.01.89
2	Perry **KITCHEN**	(27) 29.02.92
17	Sebastian **LLETGET**	(26) 03.09.92
12	Chris **PONTIUS**	(31) 12.05.87

FORWARDS

18	Uriel **ANTUNA** (Mex)	(21) 21.08.97
9	Zlatan **IBRAHIMOVIC** (Swe)	(37) 03.10.81

COACH

	Guillermo **BARROS SCHELOTTO** (Arg)	(45) 04.05.73

LOS ANGELES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Tyler **MILLER**	(26) 12.03.93
40	Phillip **EJIMADU**	(19) 31.08.99
23	Pablo **SISNIEGA** (Mex)	(23) 07.07.95

DEFENDERS

19	Lamar **BATISTA**	(20) 07.03.98
3	Steven **BEITASHOUR** (Irn)	(32) 01.02.87
27	Tristan **BLACKMON**	(22) 12.08.96
13	Mohamed **EL MONIR** (Lby)	(26) 08.04.92
12	Niko **HAMALAINEN** (Fin)	(22) 05.03.97
2	Jordan **HARVEY**	(35) 28.01.84
5	Dejan **JAKOVIC** (Can)	(33) 16.07.85
4	Eddie **SEGURA** (Col)	(22) 02.02.97
6	Danilo **SILVA** (Bra)	(32) 24.11.86
25	Walker **ZIMMERMAN**	(25) 19.05.93

MIDFIELDERS

20	Eduard **ATUESTA** (Col)	(21) 18.06.97
15	Alejandro **GUIDO**	(25) 22.03.94
8	Andre **HORTA** (Por)	(22) 07.11.96
14	Mark-Anthony **KAYE** (Can)	(24) 02.12.94
24	Lee **NGUYEN**	(32) 07.10.86
40	Peter-Lee **VASSELL** (Jam)	(20) 15.03.99

FORWARDS

7	Latif **BLESSING** (Gha)	(22) 30.12.96
28	Shaft **BREWER JR**	(19) 28.10.99
99	Adama **DIOMANDE** (Nor)	(29) 14.02.90
26	Adrien **PEREZ**	(23) 13.10.95
18	Joshua **PEREZ**	(21) 21.01.98
21	Christian **RAMIREZ**	(27) 04.04.91
9	Diego **ROSSI** (Uru)	(21) 05.03.98
10	Carlos **VELA** (Mex)	(30) 01.03.89
22	Rodolfo **ZELAYA** (ElS)	(30) 03.07.88

COACH

	Bob **BRADLEY**	(61) 03.03.58

MINNESOTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Vito **MANNONE** (Ita)	(30) 02.03.88
33	Bobby **SHUTTLEWORTH**	(31) 13.05.87
97	Dayne **ST CLAIR** (Can)	(21) 09.05.97

DEFENDERS

15	Michael **BOXALL** (NZ)	(30) 18.08.88
5	Francisco **CALVO** (CR)	(26) 08.07.92
31	Hassani **DOTSON**	(21) 06.08.97
77	Chase **GASPER**	(23) 25.01.96
14	Brent **KALLMAN**	(28) 04.10.90
2	Carter **MANLEY**	(22) 29.04.96
19	Romain **METANIRE** (Mad)	(28) 28.03.90
4	Eric **MILLER**	(26) 15.01.93
22	Wyatt **OMSBERG**	(23) 21.09.95
3	Ike **OPARA**	(30) 21.02.89

MIDFIELDERS

6	Osvaldo **ALONSO** (Cub)	(33) 11.11.85
13	Ethan **FINLAY**	(28) 06.08.90
8	Jan **GREGUS** (Slk)	(28) 29.01.91
10	Miguel **IBARRA**	(29) 15.03.90
17	Collin **MARTIN**	(24) 09.11.94
7	Kevin **MOLINO** (T&T)	(28) 17.06.90
20	Rasmus **SCHULLER** (Fin)	(27) 18.06.91

FORWARDS

99	Abu **DANLADI** (Gha)	(23) 18.10.95
11	Romario **IBARRA** (Ecu)	(24) 24.09.94
25	Darwin **QUINTERO** (Col)	(31) 19.09.87
9	Angelo **RODRIGUEZ** (Col)	(29) 04.04.89
23	Mason **TOYE**	(20) 16.10.98

COACH

	Adrian **HEATH** (Eng)	(58) 11.01.61

MONTREAL IMPACT (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

40	Jason **BEAULIEU** (Can)	(25) 12.02.94
1	Evan **BUSH**	(33) 06.03.86
23	Clement **DIOP** (Sen)	(25) 12.10.93
41	James **PANTEMIS** (Can)	(22) 21.02.97

DEFENDERS

15	Zachary **BRAULT-GUILLARD** (Can)	(20) 30.12.98
2	Víctor **CABRERA** (Arg)	(26) 07.02.93
4	Rudy **CAMACHO** (Fra)	(28) 05.03.91
5	Zakaria **DIALLO** (Fra)	(32) 11.08.86
22	Jukka **RAITALA** (Fin)	(30) 15.09.88
33	Bacary **SAGNA** (Fra)	(36) 14.02.83

MIDFIELDERS

32	Micheal **AZIRA** (Uga)	(31) 22.08.87
27	Clement **BAYIHA** (Can)	(20) 08.03.99
29	Mathieu **CHOINIERE** (Can)	(20) 07.02.99
13	Ken **KROLICKI** (Jap)	(23) 16.03.96
3	Daniel **LOVITZ**	(27) 27.08.91
10	Ignacio **PIATTI** (Arg)	(34) 04.02.85
6	Samuel **PIETTE** (Can)	(24) 12.11.94
28	Shamit **SHOME** (Can)	(21) 05.09.97
8	Saphir **TAIDER** (Alg)	(27) 29.02.92

FORWARDS

11	Anthony **JACKSON-HAMEL** (Can)	(25) 03.08.93
7	Harry **NOVILLO** (Mar)	(27) 11.02.92
18	Orji **OKWONKWO** (Nga)	(21) 19.01.98
37	Maximiliano **URRUTI** (Arg)	(28) 22.02.91

COACH

	Remi **GARDE** (Fra)	(52) 03.04.66

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

GOALKEEPERS

1	Cody **CROPPER**	(26) 16.02.93
18	Brad **KNIGHTON**	(34) 06.02.85
30	Matt **TURNER**	(24) 24.06.94

DEFENDERS

3	Jalil **ANIBABA**	(30) 19.10.88
15	Brandon **BYE**	(23) 29.11.95
8	Edgar **CASTILLO**	(32) 08.10.86
19	Antonio **DELAMEA MLINAR** (Sln)	(27) 10.06.91
2	Andrew **FARRELL**	(26) 02.04.92
28	Michael **MANCIENNE** (Eng)	(31) 08.01.88
91	Gabriel **SOMI** (Syr)	(27) 24.08.91

MIDFIELDERS

5	Isaac **ANGKING**	(19) 24.01.00
27	Luis **CAICEDO** (Col)	(22) 17.05.96
6	Scott **CALDWELL**	(28) 15.03.91
14	Diego **FAGUNDEZ** (Uru)	(24) 14.02.95
29	Nicolas **FIRMINO** (Bra)	(18) 30.01.01
22	Carles **GIL** (Spa)	(26) 22.11.92
21	Zachary **HERIVAUX** (Hai)	(23) 01.02.96
24	DeJuan **JONES**	(21) 24.06.97
23	Wilfried **ZAHIBO** (Fra)	(25) 21.08.93

FORWARDS

17	Juan **AGUDELO**	(26) 23.11.92
11	Tajon **BUCHANAN** (Can)	(20) 08.02.99
10	Teal **BUNBURY**	(29) 27.02.90
9	Juan Fernando **CAICEDO** (Col)	(29) 13.07.89
70	Cristian **PENILLA** (Ecu)	(27) 02.05.91
12	Justin **RENNICKS**	(20) 20.03.99
7	Brian **WRIGHT** (Can)	(23) 24.03.95

COACH

	Brad **FRIEDEL**	(47) 18.05.71

NEW YORK CITY

GOALKEEPERS

13	Luis **BARRAZA**	(22) 08.11.96
18	Jeff **CALDWELL**	(23) 20.02.96
1	Sean **JOHNSON**	(29) 31.05.89
41	Brad **STUVER**	(27) 16.04.91

DEFENDERS

6	Alexander **CALLENS** (Per)	(26) 04.05.92
4	Maxime **CHANOT** (Lux)	(29) 21.01.90
33	Sebastien **IBEAGHA**	(27) 21.01.92
22	Ronald **MATARRITA** (CR)	(24) 09.07.94
25	Joseph **SCALLY**	(16) 31.12.02
2	Ben **SWEAT**	(27) 04.09.91
3	Anton **TINNERHOLM** (Swe)	(28) 26.02.91

MIDFIELDERS

21	Dan **BEDOYA** (Col)	(25) 13.02.94
11	Valentin **CASTELLANOS** (Arg)	(21) 18.03.98
80	Justin **HAAK**	(17) 12.09.01
19	Jesus **MEDINA** (Par)	(21) 30.04.97
10	Maximiliano **MORALEZ** (Arg)	(32) 27.02.87
12	Ebenezer **OFORI** (Gha)	(23) 01.07.95
55	Keaton **PARKS**	(21) 06.08.97
8	Alexander **RING** (Fin)	(27) 09.04.91
15	Tony **ROCHA**	(25) 21.08.93
16	James **SANDS**	(18) 06.07.00
14	Juan Pablo **TORRES**	(19) 26.07.99

FORWARDS

17	Jonathan **LEWIS**	(21) 04.06.97
24	Alexandru **MITRITA** (Rom)	(24) 08.02.95
29	Ismael **TAJOURI** (Lby)	(24) 28.03.94

COACH

	Domenec **TORRENT** (Spa)	(56) 14.07.62

NEW YORK RED BULLS

GOALKEEPERS

24	Evan **LOURO**	(23) 19.01.96
18	Ryan **MEARA**	(28) 15.11.90
31	Luis **ROBLES**	(34) 11.05.84

DEFENDERS

6	Kyle **DUNCAN**	(21) 27.12.97
5	Connor **LADE**	(29) 16.11.89
92	Kemar **LAWRENCE** (Jam)	(26) 17.09.92
33	Aaron **LONG**	(26) 12.10.92
62	Michael Amir **MURILLO** (Pan)	(23) 11.02.96
15	Sean **NEALIS**	(22) 22.01.97
26	Tim **PARKER**	(26) 23.02.93
3	Amro **TAREK** (Egy)	(26) 17.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

88	Vincent **BEZECOURT** (Fra)	(25) 10.06.93
23	Cristian **CASSERES** (Ven)	(19) 20.01.00
27	Sean **DAVIS**	(26) 08.02.93
7	Derrick **ETIENNE** (Hai)	(22) 25.11.96
21	Omir **FERNANDEZ**	(20) 08.02.99
9	Andreas **IVAN** (Rom)	(24) 10.01.95
8	Jean-Christophe **KOFFI** (IvC)	(21) 05.01.98
17	Ben **MINES**	(18) 12.05.00
19	Alex **MUYL**	(23) 30.09.95
10	Alejandro "Kaku" **ROMERO** (Par)	(24) 11.01.95
77	Daniel **ROYER** (Aut)	(28) 22.05.90
90	Marc **RZATKOWSKI** (Ger)	(29) 02.03.90
22	Florian **VALOT** (Fra)	(26) 13.02.93

FORWARDS

11	Marcus **EPPS**	(24) 16.01.95
25	Mathias **JORGENSEN** (Den)	(18) 20.09.00
42	Brian **WHITE**	(23) 03.02.96
99	Bradley **WRIGHT-PHILLIPS** (Eng)	(34) 12.03.85

COACH

	Chris **ARMAS**	(46) 27.08.72

ORLANDO CITY

GOALKEEPERS

99	Adam **GRINWIS**	(26) 21.04.92
18	Greg **RANJITSINGH** (T&T)	(25) 18.07.93
23	Brian **ROWE**	(30) 16.11.88
31	Mason **STAJDUHAR**	(21) 02.12.97

DEFENDERS

3	Alex **DeJOHN**	(27) 10.05.91
27	Kamal **MILLER** (Can)	(21) 16.05.97
44	Joao **MOUTINHO** (Por)	(21) 12.01.98
12	Shane **O'NEILL**	(25) 02.09.93
2	**RUAN** Teixeira (Bra)	(23) 29.05.95
22	Lamine **SANE** (Sen)	(32) 11.03.87
24	Kyle **SMITH**	(27) 09.01.92

MIDFIELDERS

25	Danilo **ACOSTA**	(21) 17.11.97
26	Carlos **ASCUES** (Per)	(26) 19.06.92
10	Josue **COLMAN** (Par)	(20) 25.07.98
7	Cristian **HIGUITA** (Col)	(25) 14.01.94
4	Will **JOHNSON** (Can)	(32) 21.01.87
16	Sacha **KLJESTAN**	(33) 09.09.85
15	Cameron **LINDLEY**	(21) 18.07.97
8	Jhegson **MENDEZ** (Ecu)	(21) 26.04.97
9	Chris **MUELLER**	(22) 28.08.96
5	Dillon **POWERS**	(28) 14.02.91
20	Oriol **ROSELL** (Spa)	(26) 07.07.92

FORWARDS

13	Tesho **AKINDELE** (Can)	(26) 31.03.92
11	Pierre **DA SILVA**	(20) 28.07.98
14	Dom **DWYER**	(28) 30.07.90
19	Benji **MICHEL**	(21) 23.10.97
17	**NANI** (Por)	(32) 17.11.86
29	Santiago **PATINO** (Col)	(21) 10.03.97

COACH

	James **O'CONNOR** (Rol)	(39) 01.09.79

PHILADELPHIA UNION

GOALKEEPERS

18	Andre **BLAKE** (Jam)	(28) 21.11.90
31	Carlos **CORONEL** (Bra)	(22) 29.12.96
1	Matt **FREESE**	(20) 02.09.98

DEFENDERS

78	Aurelien **COLLIN** (Fra)	(32) 08.03.86
2	Warren **CREAVALLE** (Guy)	(28) 14.08.90
3	Jack **ELLIOTT** (Eng)	(23) 24.08.95
33	**FABINHO** (Bra)	(34) 16.03.85
28	Ray **GADDIS**	(29) 12.01.90
15	Olivier **MBAIZO** (Cam)	(21) 15.08.97
4	Mark **McKENZIE**	(10) 12.08.98
32	Matthew **REAL**	(19) 10.07.99
26	Auston **TRUSTY**	(20) 12.08.98
27	Kai **WAGNER** (Ger)	(22) 15.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

22	Brenden **AARONSON**	(18) 22.10.00
11	Alejandro **BEDOYA**	(31) 29.04.87
10	Marco **FABIAN** (Mex)	(29) 21.07.89
21	Anthony **FONTANA**	(19) 14.10.99
25	**ILSINHO** (Bra)	(33) 12.10.85
8	Derrick **JONES**	(22) 03.03.97
6	Haris **MEDUNJANIN** (Bos)	(34) 08.03.85

FORWARDS

7	David **ACCAM** (Gha)	(28) 28.09.90
19	Cory **BURKE** (Jam)	(27) 28.12.91
9	Fabrice **PICAULT**	(28) 23.02.91
23	Kacper **PRZYBYLKO** (Pol)	(25) 25.03.93
20	Sergio **SANTOS** (Bra)	(24) 04.09.94

COACH

Jim **CURTIN**		(39) 23.06.79

PORTLAND TIMBERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jeff **ATTINELLA**	(30) 29.09.88
12	Steve **CLARK**	(32) 29.04.86
31	Aljaz **IVACIC** (Sln)	(25) 29.12.93
43	Kendall **McINTOSH**	(25) 24.01.94

DEFENDERS

18	Julio **CASCANTE** (CR)	(25) 03.10.93
5	Claude **DIELNA** (Fra)	(31) 14.12.87
32	Marco **FARFAN**	(20) 12.11.98
94	Modou **JADAMA** (Gam)	(25) 17.03.94
33	Larrys **MABIALA** (DRC)	(31) 08.10.87
2	Jorge **MOREIRA** (Par)	(29) 01.02.90
16	Zarek **VALENTIN**	(27) 06.08.91
4	Jorge **VILLAFANA**	(29) 16.09.89

MIDFIELDERS

27	Dairon **ASPRILLA** (Col)	(26) 25.05.92
10	Sebastian **BLANCO** (Arg)	(29) 05.03.90
21	Diego **CHARA** (Col)	(32) 05.04.86
14	Andres **FLORES** (ElS)	(28) 31.08.90
20	David **GUZMAN** (CR)	(29) 18.02.90
22	Cristhian **PAREDES** (Par)	(20) 18.05.98
25	Bill **TUILOMA** (NZ)	(23) 27.03.95
8	Diego **VALERI** (Arg)	(30) 15.03.88
30	Eryk **WILLIAMSON**	(21) 11.06.97
40	Renzo **ZAMBRANO** (Ven)	(24) 26.08.94

FORWARDS

19	Tomas **CONECHNY** (Arg)	(20) 30.03.98
17	Jeremy **EBOBISSE**	(22) 14.02.97
28	Foster **LANGSDORF**	(23) 14.12.95
44	Marvin **LORIA** (CR)	(21) 24.04.97
26	Lucas **MELANO** (Arg)	(26) 01.03.93
11	Andy **POLO** (Per)	(24) 29.09.94

COACH

Giovanni **SAVARESE** (Ven)		(47) 14.07.71

REAL SALT LAKE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alex **HORWATH**	(31) 27.03.87
24	David **OCHOA**	(18) 16.01.01
51	Andrew **PUTNA**	(24) 21.10.94
18	Nick **RIMANDO**	(39) 17.06.79

DEFENDERS

2	Tony **BELTRAN**	(31) 11.10.87
15	Justen **GLAD**	(22) 28.02.97
3	Adam **HENLEY** (Wal)	(24) 14.06.94
22	Aaron **HERRERA**	(21) 06.06.97
20	Erik **HOLT**	(22) 06.09.96
14	Nedum **ONUOHA** (Eng)	(32) 12.11.86
30	Marcelo **SILVA** (Uru)	(30) 21.03.89
4	Donny **TOIA**	(26) 28.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

70	Jordan **ALLEN**	(23) 25.04.95
26	Luis **ARRIAGA**	(18) 06.01.01
17	Corey **BAIRD**	(22) 21.01.97
5	Kyle **BECKERMAN**	(36) 23.04.82
13	Nick **BESLER**	(25) 07.05.93
25	**EVERTON LUIZ** (Bra)	(30) 24.05.88
8	Damir **KREILACH** (Cro)	(29) 16.04.89
19	Luke **MULHOLLAND** (Eng)	(30) 07.08.88
43	Justin **PORTILLO**	(26) 09.09.92
6	Pablo **RUIZ** (Arg)	(20) 20.10.98
11	Albert **RUSNAK** (Slk)	(24) 07.07.94
23	Sebastian **SAUCEDO** (Mex)	(22) 22.01.97
7	Jefferson **SAVARINO** (Ven)	(22) 11.11.96
21	Tate **SCHMITT**	(21) 28.05.97
27	Julian **VAZQUEZ**	(17) 30.03.01

FORWARDS

50	Sam **JOHNSON** (Lbr)	(25) 06.05.93
12	Brooks **LENNON**	(21) 22.09.97
10	Joao **PLATA** (Ecu)	(27) 01.03.92

COACH

Mike **PETKE**		(43) 30.01.76

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

GOALKEEPERS

12	Matt **BERSANO**	(26) 10.09.92
18	JT **MARCINKOWSKI**	(21) 09.05.97
28	Andrew **TARBELL**	(25) 07.10.93
17	Daniel **VEGA** (Arg)	(34) 03.06.84

DEFENDERS

3	Francois **AFFOLTER** (Swi)	(28) 13.03.91
31	Harold **CUMMINGS** (Pan)	(27) 01.03.92
23	Florian **JUNGWIRTH** Ger)	(30) 27.01.89
37	Guram **KASHIA** (Geo)	(31) 04.07.87
24	Nick **LIMA**	(24) 17.11.94
33	Paul **MARIE** (Fra)	(23) 24.03.95
15	Jimmy **OCKFORD**	(26) 10.06.92

MIDFIELDERS

29	Jacob **AKANYIRIGE**	(17) 31.12.01
26	Eric **CALVILLO**	(21) 02.01.98
10	Cristian **ESPINOZA** (Arg)	(23) 03.04.95
35	Gilbert **FUENTES**	(17) 21.02.02
20	Anibal **GODOY** (Pan)	(29) 10.02.90
19	Siad **HAJI**	(22) 02.10.96
93	**JUDSON** (Bra)	(25) 25.05.93
27	Marcos **LOPEZ** (Per)	(19) 20.11.99
96	**LUIS FELIPE** Fernandes	(23) 29.01.96
89	Kevin **PARTIDA**	(24) 10.03.95
11	Vako **QAZAISHVILI** (Geo)	(26) 29.01.93
6	Shea **SALINAS**	(32) 24.06.86
22	Tommy **THOMPSON**	(23) 15.08.95
14	Jackson **YUEILL**	(22) 18.03.97

FORWARDS

44	Cade **COWELL**	(15) 14.10.03
7	Magnus **ERIKSSON** (Swe)	(28) 08.04.90
9	Danny **HOESEN** (Hol)	(28) 15.01.91
8	Chris **WONDOLOWSKI**	(36) 28.01.83

COACH

Matias **ALMEYDA** (Arg)		(45) 21.12.73

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

GOALKEEPERS

24	Stefan **FREI** (Swi)	(32) 20.04.86
35	Bryan **MEREDITH**	(29) 02.08.89
1	Trey **MUSE**	(19) 26.07.99

DEFENDERS

12	Saad **ABDUL-SALAAM**	(27) 08.09.91
3	Jonathan **CAMPBELL**	(25) 27.06.93
20	**KIM** Kee-hee (SKo)	(29) 13.07.89
18	Kelvin **LEERDAM** (Hol)	(28) 24.06.90
14	Chad **MARSHALL**	(34) 22.08.84
11	Brad **SMITH** (Aus)	(24) 09.04.94
5	Nouhou **TOLO** (Cam)	(21) 23.06.97
29	Roman **TORRES** (Pan)	(33) 20.03.86

MIDFIELDERS

70	Handwalla **BWANA** (Ken)	(19) 25.06.99
21	Jordy **DELEM** (Mar)	(26) 18.03.93
10	Nicolas **LODEIRO** (Uru)	(30) 21.03.89
8	Víctor **RODRIGUEZ** (Spa)	(29) 23.07.89
16	Alex **ROLDAN**	(22) 28.07.96
7	Cristian **ROLDAN**	(23) 03.06.95
19	Harry **SHIPP**	(27) 07.11.91
4	Gustav **SVENSSON** (Swe)	(32) 07.02.87
23	Henry **WINGO**	(23) 04.10.95

FORWARDS

17	Will **BRUIN**	(29) 24.10.89
13	Jordan **MORRIS**	(24) 26.10.94
9	Raul **RUIDIAZ** (Per)	(28) 25.07.90

COACH

Brian **SCHMETZER**		(56) 18.08.62

SPORTING KANSAS CITY

GOALKEEPERS

18	Eric **DICK**	(24) 03.10.94
29	Tim **MELIA**	(32) 15.05.86
1	Adrian **ZENDEJAS**	(23) 30.08.95

DEFENDERS

2	Botond **BARATH** (Hun)	(26) 21.04.92
5	Matt **BESLER**	(32) 11.02.87
4	Andreu **FONTAS** (Spa)	(29) 14.11.89
26	Jaylin **LINDSEY**	(17) 27.03.00
94	Jimmy **MEDRANDA** (Col)	(25) 07.02.94
3	Abdul **RWATUBYAYE** (Rwa)	(22) 23.10.96
15	Seth **SINOVIC**	(32) 28.01.87
16	Graham **SMITH**	(23) 25.11.95
8	Graham **ZUSI**	(32) 18.08.86

MIDFIELDERS

10	Yohan **CROIZET** (Fra)	(27) 15.02.92
17	Roger **ESPINOZA** (Hon)	(32) 25.10.86
21	Felipe **GUTIERREZ** (Chl)	(28) 08.10.90
6	**ILIE** Sanchez (Spa)	(28) 21.11.90
75	Wan **KUZAIN**	(20) 14.09.98
11	Kelyn **ROWE**	(27) 02.12.91
24	Gedion **ZELALEM**	(22) 26.01.97

FORWARDS

13	Gianluca **BUSIO**	(16) 28.05.02
23	Tyler **FREEMAN**	(16) 09.01.03
12	**GERSO FERNANDES** (GuB)	(28) 23.02.91
19	Erik **HURTADO**	(28) 15.11.90
9	Krisztian **NEMETH** (Hun)	(30) 05.01.89
7	Johnny **RUSSELL** (Sco)	(28) 08.04.90
20	Daniel **SALLOI** (Hun)	(22) 19.07.96
22	Rodney **WALLACE** (CR)	(30) 17.06.88

COACH

Peter **VERMES**		(52) 21.11.66

TORONTO (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

25	Alex **BONO**	(24) 25.04.94
28	Caleb **PATTERSON-SEWELL**	(31) 20.05.87
16	Quentin **WESTBERG**	(32) 25.04.86

DEFENDERS

96	**AURO** (Bra)	(23) 23.01.96
26	Laurent **CIMAN** (Blg)	(33) 05.08.85
52	Julian **DUNN-JOHNSON** (Can)	(18) 11.07.00
23	Chris **MAVINGA** (DRC)	(27) 26.05.91
3	Drew **MOOR**	(35) 15.01.84
5	Ashtone **MORGAN** (Can)	(28) 09.02.91
2	Justin **MORROW**	(31) 04.10.87
9	Gregory **VAN DER WIEL** (Hol)	(31) 03.02.88
15	Eriq **ZAVALETA**	(26) 02.08.92

MIDFIELDERS

4	Michael **BRADLEY**	(31) 31.07.87
48	Dante **CAMPBELL** (Can)	(19) 22.05.99
14	Jay **CHAPMAN** (Can)	(25) 01.01.94
55	Aidan **DANIELS** (Can)	(20) 06.09.98
18	Nick **DeLEON**	(28) 17.07.90
8	Marky **DELGADO**	(23) 16.05.95
27	Liam **FRASER** (Can)	(21) 13.02.98
59	Noble **OKELLO** (Can)	(18) 20.07.00
21	Jonathan **OSORIO** (Can)	(26) 12.06.92
10	Alejandro **POZUELO** (Spa)	(27) 20.09.91

FORWARDS

20	Ayo **AKINOLA**	(19) 20.01.00
17	Jozy **ALTIDORE**	(29) 06.11.89
11	Jon **BAKERO** (Spa)	(22) 05.11.96
91	Terrence **BOYD**	(28) 16.02.91
19	Griffin **DORSEY**	(20) 05.03.99
31	Tsubasa **ENDOH** (Jap)	(25) 20.08.93
7	Jordan **HAMILTON** (Can)	(22) 17.03.96
84	Jacob **SHAFFELBURG** (Can)	(19) 26.11.99
54	Ryan **TELFER** (Can)	(25) 04.03.94

COACH

Greg **VANNEY**		(44) 11.06.74

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

16	Maxime **CREPEAU** (Can)	(24) 11.04.94
18	Zac **MacMATH**	(27) 07.08.91
39	Sean **MELVIN** (Can)	(24) 09.07.94

DEFENDERS

-	Ali **ADNAN** (Irq)	(25) 19.12.93
94	Victor "PC" **GIRO** (Bra)	(25) 10.03.94
22	Erik **GODOY** (Arg)	(25) 16.08.93
2	Doneil **HENRY** (Can)	(25) 20.04.93
20	Jasser **KHMIRI** (Tun)	(21) 27.07.97
46	Brett **LEVIS** (Can)	(25) 29.05.93
28	Jake **NERWINSKI**	(24) 17.10.94
23	Scott **SUTTER** (Swi)	(32) 13.05.86

MIDFIELDERS

55	Michael **BALDISIMO** (Can)	(18) 13.04.00
54	Simon **COLYN** (Can)	(16) 23.03.02
6	Jon **ERICE** (Spa)	(32) 03.11.86
8	**FELIPE** Martins (Bra)	(28) 30.09.90
4	**HWANG** In-beom (SKo)	(22) 20.09.96
24	David **NORMAN JR** (Can)	(20) 31.05.98
29	Yordy **REYNA** (Per)	(25) 16.09.93
15	Andy **ROSE** (Eng)	(29) 13.02.90
31	Russell **TEIBERT** (Can)	(26) 22.12.92

FORWARDS

9	Joaquin **ARDAIZ** (Uru)	(20) 11.01.99
50	Theo **BAIR** (Can)	(19) 27.08.99
19	Lass **BANGOURA** (Gui)	(26) 30.03.92
13	Derek **CORNELIUS** (Can)	(21) 25.11.97
12	Fredy **MONTERO** (Col)	(31) 26.07.87
7	Lucas **VENUTO** (Bra)	(24) 14.01.95

COACH

Marc **DOS SANTOS** (Can)		(41) 26.05.77

(age as of 22.03.19)

Most recent...Daniel De Rossi of Roma tackles Lazio's Felipe Caicedo in March this year

LAZIO v ROMA

Two teams, one ground and a shared dislike for each other; welcome to the Derby della Capitale

With Italian football being dominated by clubs from the north of the country – Juventus (36), Milan (18) and Internazionale (18) have been champions more often than anyone else – the capital derby can be seen by the fans as a test of who best represents Rome's chances of usurping the north.

As far back as 1927 the city sought a club to challenge the north and this resulted in the merger of three teams (Roman, Alba-Audace and Fortitudo) to form AS Roma. Founded in 1900, SS Lazio were excluded from this amalgamation – and so began a bitter rivalry between the pair.

Although Lazio fans were originally mostly middle-class citizens from Parioli in the city's northern district, and Roma took up residence in the working-class Testaccio neighbourhood, the pair have shared the Stadio Olimpico since 1953. But calling the same ground home has done little to foster friendly relations between the two.

The intensity of the derby is such that its history is littered with incidents such as Lazio's Giorgio Chinaglia demanding his team-mates burn their shirts after a loss in the 1970s and Sergio Petrelli, who joined Lazio after playing for Roma, firing a gun from a balcony to scare off fans of his former club.

Sadly, it has also led to tragedy, and in 1979 a Lazio fan died after he was hit by a flare fired by a Roma fan at the other end of the stadium. WS

Violence...Roma's Francesco Totti (left) and Sinisa Mihajlovic of Lazio during the 2004 derby, which was abandoned when fans rioted

ON BOTH SIDES

FULVIO BERNARDINI	ATTILIO FERRARIS	ARNE SELMOSSON	LIONELLO MANFREDONIA	SINISA MIHAJLOVIC	ALEKSANDAR KOLAROV
Lazio: 1923-26; (coach) 1958-60	Roma: 1927-34, 1938-39	Lazio: 1955-58	Lazio: 1975-85	Roma: 1992-94	Lazio: 2007-10
Roma: 1928-39; (coach) 1949-50	Lazio: 1934-36	Roma: 1958-61	Roma: 1987-89	Lazio: 1998-2004	Roma: 2017-present

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1929 Dec 8
Rodolfo Volk scores the only goal of the game as Roma win the first derby. They go on to lose just one of their first 13 meetings with Lazio.

1998 Mar 8
Lazio beat Roma for the fourth time in a season, their 2-0 win in Serie A coming on the back of a 3-1 league success earlier in the campaign and victory in both legs of an Italian Cup quarter-final.

2013 May 26
Meeting in the Italian Cup Final for the first time, Lazio triumph 1-0 with a goal from Senad Lulic.

2015 Jan 15
Francesco Totti, playing in his 40th derby, scores twice as Roma battle back for a 2-2 draw.

2019 Mar 2
Lazio win the most recent meeting 3-0, but Roma still hold the upper hand with 71 victories, 53 defeats and 64 draws.

"Art of Football bring out
the beauty in the game's most
memorable moments" Copa90

"Art of Football capture classic
moments in a vibrant,
contemporary style" The Guardian

"Art of Football get it.
those split-second moments
are treasured memories and their
artwork captures them in a
classy and stylish way" Ball Street

"Art of Football's shirts capture
the vibrancy of the game
like no other" Dirty Tackle

"Art of Football - where the
beautiful game comes to life"
Hitesh Ratna, Editor, FourFourTwo

"The Art of Football team create
truly unique and authentic content
that is designed to emotionally connect
real fans to the biggest moments
in the game" Adidas Uk

Art-of-football.com